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DIME NOVELS



THE BORDER RENEGADE.

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THE
Joseph Dibdin
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OR,

THE LILY OF THE SILVER LAKE.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,

Author of the following Dime Novels:

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THE BORDER RENEGADE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-GRAPPLE.

"DURN the feller—whar kin he be? The sun's more'n a-hour past the dead tree, a'ready, an' he ain't here yit!"

These words were uttered in a subdued tone of disgust, not unmixed with surprise, by a man evidently of white blood, on a clear June day, in the year 1812.

He stood upon the slope of a small hill, and his gaze was roving restlessly around him, now over the woods, now out upon the tranquil surface of Lake St. Clair. His soliloquy explained the meaning of these glances; he was awaiting the arrival of a friend at this, the appointed rendezvous.

In figure he was of an unusually massive build, though but little above the mean height. His shoulders were of immense breadth, his limbs thick and seemingly clumsy; but it was the great folds of hard muscle that gave him this appearance. His chest was deep and rounded; his hands bony and muscular.

Only in the deep seams and wrinkles upon his face, together with the long hair and beard of a dirty grizzled white, were evidences of his advanced age. His form was as erect, his movements as agile and springy as though still in the prime of life.

He stood leaning upon a heavy barreled flintlock rifle; in the girdle at his waist were a hatchet and long knife. His garb was rude, and partook more of the savage than civilized life. Beaded moccasins covered his feet; a soiled red handkerchief was wound turban-fashion around his head.

His eyes turned from the lake, and glanced upward, where stood the tall scarred trunk of a tree, whose life had vanished before the lightning's searing breath. The sun showed high above its jagged top.

"Wal, ef I must, I must, I s'pose, but while waitin', I'll eat a snack. He won't be much longer, I reckon. Fust time I knowed him to break his word."

The man turned and glided along the hillside toward a bushy topped tree, and choosing a shady spot, sat down, and producing a few fragments of dried meat and corn-cakes from the pouch by his side, began leisurely munching them, occasionally moistening the dry food with copious draughts from a goodly sized flask taken from the same receptacle.

He was seated close to the verge of an abrupt fall in the hill, nearly perpendicular, for some four or five yards. This miniature precipice was formed of rocks, cracked and crumbling, eaten by the frost.

At its foot were scattered numerous boulders, of various sizes, that had fallen from the face, from time to time. Then the hill again sloped gradually down toward the lake, studded here and there with trees and shrubbery.

The hunter was seated in the shade, upon this rock, where the grass and moss formed a comfortable resting-place, all unconscious of the great peril that threatened him. But he was not left long in ignorance.

A slight rustling noise met his ear, trained to watchfulness by a long life of almost constant peril and danger. A noise that to a less trained ear would have passed for a gust of wind playing through the leafy tree-top, or the fall of some decayed twig.

But the hunter thought different. He gave a slight start, but then motionless as a statue, save his eyes, that roved quickly around him, he listened for a repetition of the suspicious sound.

It came, almost immediately, and guided by it, the hunter glanced up into the bushy tree-top, in whose shade he sat. And there a dreaded object met his gaze.

Crouched along a huge gnarled limb that shot out horizontally, was the long, gaunt form of a panther, its greenish-yellow eyes glittering with a deadly fire, riveted upon the figure of its intended victim. There could be no mistaking it.

The long form, the slowly sweeping tail, the cat-like head with short ears laid back; the red dripping lips drawn aside until the twin rows of long white fangs were distinctly vis-

ible; the huge, muscular paws, half-clasping the limb, their sharp yellow talons convulsively piercing the rough bark; all proclaimed that ferocious king of the northern forest—the panther.

The keen eye of the old hunter took in all this at a single glance, and more. He saw that the beast was about to spring upon him—that every nerve and muscle was quivering for the deadly leap.

The heavy rifle lay beside him, ready for use, but would he have time to level it? As his only hope, the woodman seized upon it and raised its muzzle toward the threatening beast. But he had not time for more.

Uttering an ear-splitting yell, the panther shot out from the limb, and launched its heavy body, full upon the hunter. It struck first upon the heavy rifle-barrel, and so great was its momentum, that the weapon was twisted from the hands that clutched it, and hurled some yards away, while the beast's body bore the man backward to the ground.

But the disarming had one good result, at least, for it threw the panther partially aside, so that its fore-paws passed to the right of the woodman. And ere it could recover itself, the huge bony hands clutched its throat with a grip rendered doubly strong by despair.

Then ensued a terrific struggle, though of brief duration. The infuriated beast strove to free its head, but the hunter maintained his choking grip with wonderful tenacity, regardless of the painful scratches inflicted upon his arms and body by the cruel claws of the panther.

The force of the wild beast's leap had carried them both still nearer the edge of the miniature precipice. As stated, the face of the rock was cracked and eaten by the action of frost, and the violent struggles of man and beast produced a natural catastrophe.

As they neared the edge of the rock, it suddenly gave way, with a crackling rumble, and precipitated the combatants down upon the jagged rocks below, masses of *debris* rattling after. A cry broke from the lips of the hunter; a shrill yell from the panther; then came a momentary silence, while the cloud of dust slowly rose upon the faint breeze.

The hunter was lying partly upon one side, a rough, jagged

boulder at his back partially supporting him. His feet and legs, up from his knees, were buried beneath a mass of the dingy, crumbling rock.

The panther was at some little distance, crouching down upon a gray boulder, whither it had sprung after the fall, its eyes glowing with mingled rage and affright. But then a low, grating snarl broke from its lips as it settled further back upon its haunches.

The hunter read this action aright. He knew that the maddened beast was preparing to spring upon him, and for the first time a sensation of terror filled his heart. And well he might tremble, for as he strove to draw up his legs, to prepare for the threatened struggle, he found them immovable.

The mighty rock held them to the ground with a force he could not overcome. Held him there to his death, as it seemed!

The great drops of cold perspiration stood thickly out on his brow, and his eyes glared at the beast with an expression of horror and despair. He believed that his time had come; that his long and eventful career, whether of good or evil, was to be terminated by the jaws of a wild beast.

He read aright the deepened glow that filled the creature's eyes. He knew that the crisis was at hand, and, true to his training, resolved to die battling desperately for life; though so helpless, he would not perish a tame victim.

His right hand whipped the long knife from his belt, while the other arm was thrown up before his face. This action seemed a signal for the fearful leap.

With a low, venomous snarl, the panther's form lengthened out and shot through the air, and alighted full upon the hunter's breast. Only for the boulder behind him, the man would have been conquered almost ere he had time to strike one blow in self-defense.

But it supported him, and one strong arm pushed the panther's head back, while the long knife gleamed brightly in the sunlight, as it fell, driven by a powerful hand to the very shaft, in the brute's side. Then ensued a confused death-grapple.

A pen can not describe it; the movements were by far too

rapid and changeful. But through it all the strong right arm plied the trusty knife that now shone with a dull reddish glare, while the life-blood of both man and beast plentifully besprinkled the gray rocks.

Such a struggle could not last long. It was by far too fierce, too deadly. Scarcely a score of seconds had elapsed from the leap, ere a brief pause ensued.

The hunter, with blood flowing freely from his body—with blood trickling from a long gash across his face, lay there beneath the heavy body, his strong arm still holding the brute's head back, his eyes fully meeting the fiery glare that filled those of his mad antagonist. One leg of the panther was held as in a vice between the knees of the hunter, while the long talons of the other convulsively pierced the quivering flesh of a leg. Its sleek side was now scored with a dozen gaping wounds, made by the keen knife, from which flowed the hot, steaming blood. Its form trembled and quivered convulsively. Its race was well-nigh run.

Then the knife rose once more—fell—the weapon sunk deep in the broad, heaving chest of the brute. A fierce snarl broke from its lips. Only one; then the fiery glitter dimmed in its eyes, the head drooped, and the huge, cat-like form slowly sunk down upon the panting body of its conqueror.

A gurgling gasp—one convulsive quiver of its mighty frame, and the king of the forest was dead!

Uttering a hoarse curse, the hunter flung the dead brute from his body, and glanced wildly around him. Then a shudder agitated his frame, his eyes closed, and his senses fled.

It seemed as though the victory had been a defeat; that both combatants were dead!

Only for a brief moment, however. Then the head of the hunter raised, and his voice rung out in feeble accents, crying for help. Again, and again, each succeeding cry feebler and less strong.

But only the echoes of his own voice answered him. Only that and the fitful sighing of the spring breeze, as it eddied over the rocks and rustled among the forest trees.

He struggled to a sitting position, and strove to cast aside the

rocks that held his feet. But in vain. The task was beyond his strength. Then with a gasping cry, he sunk back.

One quivering shudder, a twitching of the facial muscles, and then motionless silence. A ghastly gray shade settled down upon his face.

CHAPTER II.

A WARNING CONFIRMED.

A FIGURE of the medium height, lithe, supple, and rounded in most perfect symmetry. The figure of a woman, a young maiden, strolling dreamily along through the forest-covered hills..

The face was an almost perfect oval, the brows rising up nobly into a high, broad forehead. Large, lustrous eyes, black and glowing, arched with jetty brows; long, silken lashes, now raised as the eyes glanced quickly around, anon shading the twin lights as they drooped.

A small curved mouth, with lips red and slightly pouting; lips that seemed made for kisses. The dimpled chin softly rounded, the shapely neck, closely encircled by the plain dress of woolen fabric; the hands bare and sun-embrowned; the trim, dainty feet incased in jauntily-beaded moccasins. Her head was bare—for in one hand swung the straw hat—and the jetty hair hung in waving curls far down her shoulders.

Such was Agnes Letcher, in so far as words can describe her appearance.

Suddenly she paused, with a considering air, not unmixed with affright. A strange sound had saluted her hearing—the sound of a human voice crying for help.

She stood hearkening, poised upon one foot, in readiness for either flight or advance. Then the cry came again; this time there could be no mistaking it.

Agnes hesitated for a moment, but then started forward, in the direction from whence the sound proceeded. A thought of

probable danger to herself assailed her, but this was quickly banished.

The savages were at peace with the pale-faces, and those of the red race who had visited the lone cabin, had ever met with a kind and cordial welcome. They had vowed eternal peace with their white father, Francis Letcher.

The cry rang out once more, and Agnes located the sound with tolerable accuracy. Then she hastened onward, agitated and troubled.

In a few moments she stood near the spot from whence the cry for help had proceeded, though, as she glanced hurriedly around, nothing unusual met her eye. This at first; but then a torn and bruised piece of turf met her gaze, beside which lay a rifle.

Agnes glided forward and stood upon the edge of a miniature precipice. A cry broke from her lips as she glanced downward. A thrilling sight saluted her eyes.

The dead and mutilated body of a huge beast, that she recognized for a panther, lying doubled up beside a rock; the crimson spots and splashes over the gray boulders; the motionless figure of a human being, lying half-covered up with crumbling rocks, the body and face bearing long, ghastly traces of the wild beast's fearful claws.

Agnes shrunk back in horror and her face turned still more pale, for she believed that the man also was dead. But then the cries—surely he must have uttered them?

"I will go down and see—he may be only fainting," she murmured, agitatedly.

Turning to the left, Agnes ran a few yards, until reaching a point where the descent was less steep, and sure-footed as a goat, she hurriedly clambered down the crumbling rocks. A few moments carried her to where the stranger lay, so death-like and ghastly.

But then she paused, doubting what to do. She had all a woman's horror of death, and surely the sight was sickening enough to excuse this in one of far stronger mind than our fair maiden.

The hunter's garments were tattered and rent, the lacerated flesh showing through them, where the cruel claws had been at work. The blood had flown freely, and, saturating the

rude garments, stood in fast-coagulating pools upon the rocky ground.

A feeble moan broke the stillness, sounding fearfully loud to the agitated senses of the maiden. Then, as she glanced at the stranger's face, Agnes uttered a little cry.

His eyes were open, and regarding her with a wondering expression. Agnes shuddered as she shrunk back, for it seemed to her that a baleful light was glowing in their depths; much as she would have felt at the fascinating glitter of a serpent's eyes.

"Who—who air ye?" muttered the wounded hunter, as he struggled to arise; and then his head fell back, and he uttered a moan of pain.

All the womanly sympathies of the maiden's nature were aroused at this, and Agnes sprung forward, kneeling beside him. She tenderly raised his head from the jagged rock, but again felt that strange repulsion, as his eyes met hers. She mechanically answered the question thus mutely repeated.

"I'm Agnes Letcher—I live only a little way from here. I heard your cries for help, and came to see what was the matter."

"That painter—he did it. Jumped on me unawares, as I was eatin'. But I finished the imp!" muttered the stranger, with a savage satisfaction in his husky tones.

"But you—you are badly hurt, I'm afraid?"

"I don't know—mebbe so. Reckon it's from bleedin' so, mor'n any thin' else. I think I could git up ef 'twasn't for them rocks on my feet. The scratches didn't mount to much, I reckon—on'y skin deep. My legs hurts the wust," and a groan broke from the hunter's lips, as he strove to move.

Agnes sprung up, and with eager haste, began removing the rocks that covered the man's feet. Though forming a goodly pile, they were so frost-eaten and cracked, that her strength was sufficient to remove them, one by one, revealing the left leg of the sufferer doubled awkwardly over a boulder.

"Thank ye, miss. You're a good gal to help a feller," muttered the old man, with a sigh of relief.

"It is nothing. I would do as much for a dog, if I found him helpless. But try—can not you get up?"

"If you'll help me—I don't like to trouble ye so much, but—"

Agnes stooped, and he passed one arm over her shoulder. Then he slowly rose erect, but a cry grated through his clenched teeth, as his weight rested upon the leg. It had evidently been injured more seriously than he thought.

"It's no use," he muttered, as he sunk back upon the boulder, "I cain't do it. Reckon my leg's broke. Feels like it, anyhow."

His voice was low and even, but the great drops that started out upon his blood-stained face, told how great was his agony. He bore the torture like a veritable savage.

"I can not help you by myself, but you must not stay here. Father is at home—I will go for him, if you can wait here."

"I cain't very well help myself, the way things is. But it don't seem right fer a pritty gal like you to wait on a old teller such as I be," and his gray eyes rested admiringly upon the flushed countenance of Agnes, until she turned away in confusion.

"I will not be long—it is less than a mile to our house, from here. Once there, my father will soon cure your hurts."

"Wait a bit. Did you see any thin' o' a rifle 'round here? The mate o' this pesky painter may be snooopin' around, an' 'd soon finish what t'other started."

"Yes--wait a moment and I'll get it."

In a few moments Agnes returned with the weapon, and the hunter seized it with a cry of delight. A glance assured him that it had not been injured, and as he turned to thank the maiden, he saw she had left him, and was already speeding along the hillside.

Muttering indistinctly to himself, the hunter renewed the priming, and then bent over to examine the injured leg. To his great joy, he found that no bones were broken, though the flesh was lacerated and sadly bruised.

"Tain't much; it'll be all right in a week, if I let whisky alone," he uttered, with a grimace at the last words. "But, Lord! that gal! A angel, ef ever thar was one on airth! I've heord tell lots o' her, but I thought 'twas all liea. It

must be the one : Letcher, an' lives high here. Yas, it is, shore!"

Nearly an hour rolled by, and the hunter remained buried in deep meditation, and not the most pleasant, either, judging from the black frown that rested upon his face. But then he was aroused by the sound of approaching footsteps on the hillside below him.

That danger was no stranger to his life, was shown by the manner in which he raised his rifle, and the flashing of his gray eye. But then the weapon was lowered, as he recognized the figure of Agnes Letcher, coming toward him, accompanied by an elderly man, rudely clad, bearing a rifle and heavy ax.

"Hellow, stranger, glad to see ye!" called out the hunter, as this latter personage glanced toward him. "Got into a pesky scrape here, mebbe ye know?"

"So I see. But never mind. We'll fix that all right in a little time," responded Letcher, in a cheery tone, but with a keen glance into the hunter's face. "You are a stranger here, I see. I don't remember ever meeting with you before this."

"We didn't happen thar at the same time, I reckon, though I've seed your cabin more'n onceet. Thought I'd drap in to-day for a bit, but this painter fooled me. Mebbe you've heerd o' me though—Con Orem?"

"I don't remember the name," said Letcher, thoughtfully. "But never mind now. The first thing is to get you where I can attend to your hurts. I'll have to make a litter, I guess, as Agnes says you can not walk. Is your leg broken?"

"No, jest smashed up a bit. But if you'll lend me your arm, I guess I kin git along."

"Best not try it further than the foot of the hill ; it might be dangerous. I can drag you in a litter, better, then."

With the strong arm of Letcher to assist him, Con Orem reached the foot of the hill, and then the ax of the dextrous woodsmen quickly fashioned a rude litter, upon which the wounded man reclined. Then it was a comparatively easy task for the sturdy settler to drag him along through the forest, to the little cabin where he lived, Agnes following and carrying both rifles.

The cabin was built of logs, and fashioned with an eye to defense against the Indians, situated in a pleasant opening, close beside a running spring. A small plot of ground was under cultivation, that evidently helped to eke out the game procured in abundance from the surrounding woods.

Several years before the date of our story, Francis Letcher came here and settled down to an almost hermit-like life. He had fled from the society of his fellow men, not from any sin of his own, but was driven to the forest wilds by a heart-crushing sorrow.

The hand of death had fallen heavily upon his once-happy family. The wife and mother died first, followed in close succession by a son and daughter, leaving only Agnes alive, with her father.

Utterly heart-broken, the bereaved man disposed of his business, and, together with his only child, wandered restlessly to the vicinity of the Great Lakes, finally settling where we find them, on the banks of the St. Clair.

Con Orem was quickly made comfortable in the cabin, and treated very kindly. But still he did not appear at ease. Something seemed weighing heavily upon his mind.

His eyes were ever roving restlessly around him, unless when Agnes was in view. Then they were riveted upon her face or form, with an intentness she found far from agreeable, though there was naught save a respectful admiration—at times almost of veneration—visible in the gray depths.

That, and the succeeding day and night, passed by in quietness. Yet he was very reserved, and rarely spoke unless first addressed, brooding over his great loss, that his heart felt fully as acutely now as years before, when the blow first fell.

But the uneasiness of Orem continued to increase, until Agnes could not help but notice it, and finally spoke to her father regarding it. But the time was near at hand when they both would understand the matter better.

The hunter was rapidly regaining his usual strength and the use of his bruised limb. He could hobble around with comparative ease, and shortly after breakfast, on the second day following the one when had occurred his death-grapple, he announced his intention of departing.

"Why so—what's the hurry? You are not fit yet to travel the woods. Stay a little longer," hospitably urged Letcher.

"I cain't—I must be goin', though I'd like to stay longer, mighty well. It's bin very pleasant fer me," and he cast a wistful glance toward Agnes. "The pleasantest days I kin remember. But I must be goin'."

"Your business is not so urgent, I am sure."

"It is—a heap more so'n you think. But you've bin kind to me when I was onder the weather. I hain't got much to give, but I'll show ye I hain't so ongrateful as mought be. But fust—you don't go to the settlements often?"

"No—I came here to be alone. I was at Detroit a few months ago for ammunition. You are the only white man I've seen since."

"But Injuns—you see *them*?"

"Yes, occasionally. They sometimes stop here for food, and to rest."

"They seem fri'ndly?"

"Yes. We have ever made a point of treating them kindly; why should they be otherwise?"

"In time o' peace that sounds all right enough, fri'nd, but not now. When the hatchet is dug up, an' the war trail folled, a Injun knows no fri'nd except those who is of the same color. A white scalp is a mighty good thing, an' looks big in thar eyes, an' those very ones who hes ett an' drunk 'th you the oftenest, 'd be the fust one to stick a tomahawk into this pritty head here."

Orem spoke earnestly, and Letcher glanced keenly into his face. He saw the truth written there, and felt that this was no idle warning.

"Speak plainer—you really do not mean that the Indians have taken the war-path again? that peace is broken?"

"I jest do. Thet's jest what I mean. I tell it fer truth, fri'nd. Ef war hain't bin openly declared 'twixt the old country an' us here, it will be afore many days. The red-skins has struck more'n one lick a'ready. Tecumseh is stirrin' them all up, an' he's got the Pottawatomies, Delawares an' a lot o' the Miamis to jine him, that I know on. They'll make a clean sweep this time, ef they kin. You're in a bad

place here, an' ef you'll take my advice, you'll strike out for Detroit, jest as soon as you possibly kin. A day more may be too late."

"Why did you not tell me this before? Why wait until now?" demanded Letcher, suspiciously.

"Jest think a bit an' you'll see. You was a stranger to me. You seem to keep away from all the whites. Then how'd I know but you was a good fri'nd to the red-skins? A trail-scout don't break kiver 'ithout seein' some way o' gittin' cl'ar. But thar's time yit. Take your boat an' go. Ef not fer your own sake, think o' her," said Con Orem, again glancing toward Agnes.

"Will you go with us?"

"Yas—part way; but thar's work fer me to do. Now I kin travel ag'in, I must go on and warn sich whites as live in dangersonme places, too fur from the settlements to hear the news in time. I'll go with ye as fur as the river; a'ter that it's all plain travelin' to the fort."

"Wait, then. I must think it over. I'll give you an answer soon," said Letcher, as he turned from the cabin and strolled toward the lake shore, deep buried in thought.

Con Orem seated himself beside the fireplace, and lighting his pipe, smoked vehemently. His gray eyes closely watched Agnes through the curling wreaths of hazy smoke, as she busied herself with household duties, all unconscious of the trouble brewing, for the conversation had been carried on beyond her hearing.

Only a few minutes had elapsed since the departure of Letcher, ere the inmates of the cabin were startled by a terribly significant sound from without. A clear rifle-crack rung out, followed by several others, these last accompanied by loud, shrill yells, that could only emanate from the throats of savages.

Agnes uttered a shriek, and a bitter curse broke from the lips of Orem as he sprung toward the door. Right well did they divine the meaning of that alarm. They knew that the worst had come—that the savage foe was upon them.

"Easy, gal—easy!" cried Orem as he caught Agnes by the arm and restrained her from rushing from the building. "They'll on'y shoot ye, too, ef ye show out thar!"

"But father--they have killed my father!" gasped Agnes, as she struggled desperately in the hunter's strong grasp.

"No they hain't--see, thar he comes!"

And such was indeed the case. Through the open door could be seen the tall form of Letcher, bounding rapidly toward the cabin, glancing over his shoulder at the yelling savages who had fired upon him.

These last had evidently just landed from several canoes, that were visible from the cabin, stranded upon the lake shore, and the unsteady motion of these crafts had probably saved the recluse from falling a victim to the rifle bullets of the Indians. And now, as if confident of an easy victory, the savages darted after the fleeing figure, brandishing their weapons, but making no attempt to shoot him down.

"See—he's all right. Go now an' close the window—quick. I'll stay here an' bar the door after him," hurriedly uttered Con Orem, and he released Agnes.

She did as bade, and swung to the heavy slab shutter, securing it with a cross-bar. The next instant Letcher dashed into the cabin, and then the heavy door swung shut, and the stout bars were dexterously dropped into their fastenings by the old hunter.

Scarcely was this accomplished, when a heavy jar shook the cabin to its very foundations. The savages had rushed in a body against the door, hoping, no doubt, to burst it open ere the pale-faces could secure it perfectly. But in this they were disappointed.

The actions of Con Orem were prompt and decided, showing him a man used to critical emergencies. He snatched Letcher's rifle from his hand, and thrusting its muzzle through a loop-hole, fired.

Then he sprung to the fire-place and regained his own weapon. But this time the weapon was not discharged.

"The imp's is gone!" he cried, with a low chuckle; "they've tuck to kiver, now they see thar's a show fer a skirmish. They ain't overly fond o' standin' up afore a white man's rifle, when its muzzle's turned toward thar own hides."

"Father—are you—say you—are not hurt?" tremblingly cried Agnes, as she sprung forward and clung to her parent's form.

"No, I am not—I don't think so. It came so sudden, that I hardly know whether they hit me or not," half-laughed Letcher.

"How'd it happen?"

"I was by the water, and chanced to look toward the point, where I saw three canoes. As I turned toward the house, they fired at me. The rest you know as well as I do."

To Agnes' great joy, Letcher was unharmed, but then she shuddered apprehensively, as a chorus of loud yells arose from without. The dreaded enemy had not abandoned their anticipated victims, and the worst was yet to come.

"How many was thar? Did you see?" thoughtfully asked Orem.

"Three boats full—over twenty, I know."

"Too many, by hafe! But mebbe it'll be all right yit," muttered the old hunter, as he listened intently to the yells that still went up from the wood beyond. "They're Deuk-wares—I know thar yell."

There was a peculiar cadence in the tones of Orem, as he uttered the last words, that caused Letcher to glance inquiringly toward him. But the svarthy features of the old hunter were unreadable to the eyes of the recluse.

CHAPTER III.

FRIEND OR FOE?

FRANCIS LETCHER was naturally very uneasy, for although his past life had not been so happy that he would greatly regret leaving it altogether, so far as himself was concerned, there was still one dear tie that bound him to earth, in the presence of his daughter. For Agnes, then, he was anxious to live; he could not leave her alone, without friends or kindred.

Strange as it may appear, Con Orem was the most uneasy and perturbed of the trio. And yet that might be because

he realized their peril more thoroughly than did his companions in misfortune.

The cries and yells of the savages had now utterly ceased. Not a sign of their presence could be detected from the house; even the canoes had disappeared from the lake shore.

As Letcher observed this, his countenance lightened, for, in his ignorance of savage nature—at least where they were upon the war-path—he believed they had retreated and abandoned the object as hopeless, or else one in which the hope of reward was overbalanced by the danger they must first encounter.

"They've gone—thank God!" he exclaimed, fervently, as he turned from his loop.

"Don't you b'lieve it fri'nd," quickly responded Orem, with a significant shake of his head. "'Tain't thar natur' to do sech. Thar's a heap more for us to be skeered of now, then when they're like a bit sence. *Thet* told they was undecided—didn't know what to do fust, like. But *this* sais they've settled onto some plan, an' air a-carryin' it out. Be shore you'll see 'em soon enough—an' feel 'em, too, if things don't turn out better'n I expect. What is one man—for they don't know 'at I'm here, an' they *do* know who you air, in course. What is one man an' a gal, then, to skeer out twenty redskins, fresh on the war-path? No, no; you've mistook, fri'nd. Depend on't, you're wrong in your guess."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do, sartinly. They're Delawares—I know *thet* by thar yells. They'll be 'mong the very wust the whites'll hav to deal with, this war. They've bore a heap, o' past years, an' 'll go in heavy, now, to wipe it out. I know 'em well—I've scouted 'th some o' thar best braves, in time o' peace. They're cunnin' warriors, an' stick cluss to thar work," added the old hunter, thoughtfully.

"But what do you advise, then? How do you think it will end?"

"Twenty ag'in two; you kin count up the odds yourself, easy," coolly replied Orem.

"But the cabin is strong—help may come."

"From whar? No, no; depend on't, this is no boy's play. It's a *war*, mind ye, an' I sadly doubt me, ef thar's a hafe-do-

zen cabins in all Michigan but what is spotted, just as your'n is. Detroit, Chicago Creek Post, an' all is marked down for massacre. More folks'll need help than'll git it, I'm dub'ous."

"Well, we have two rifles, plenty of food, water and ammunition. We can die like men, if no more. They shall have no bloodless victory to boast over."

"But, father, may they not burn the house?" timidly suggested Agnes.

Letcher started at these words. It was a peril he had not thought of, strangely enough. The cabin was built of pine logs, mostly, now dry and resinous. Thoroughly seasoned, they would easily ignite, and there were no means of extinguishing the flames, though the cabin contained drinking water sufficient for several days, with proper economy.

"No, don't fear that," observed Orem. "They'll hardly try that plan, ontel others fail. It'd warn the other settlers, mebbe too soon for the plans o' the Injuns. They'll try a rush, fust, I think."

"Well, since it must come, I would it were now. This suspense is dreadful!" muttered Letcher, peering from his loophole.

"It may be the means o' savin' us all, yit," slowly observed the old hunter.

"What do you mean?" quickly demanded the recluse, turning and gazing keenly into the man's face.

"Now honest—do you think that we—us two—kin rub out all those red-skins afore they bu'st open the door?"

"No—I do not even hope it. Only we will sell our lives dearly. If they attack us earnestly, I see no earthly hope for us."

"Wal, then, ef we must fall into thar hands, anyhow, wouldn't it be better to do so afore blood is drawed, to make 'em still madder? Ef you do rub out a hafe-dozen or so, will that make our chances any better'n they be now?"

"I don't understand you; speak plainer," said Letcher, dubiously eying the hunter.

"An' yit, I said the words plain a-plenty. You say you know we can't whip 'em?"

Letcher nodded assent.

"Then in course they must bag us. Ef we rub out any o' them in doin' it, will they let us go free—think?"

"No, certainly not. They will kill us. But I expect that, and must have some little satisfaction, first," moodily responded Letcher.

"Yes, an' few to one 'at they'll put us all to the tortur', fust. Even to be pris'ners 'll be better'n that, wouldn't it? We'd hev a chancce to escape, then, sometime, while ol' a feller's clean dead, he *cain't*—kin he?"

"Look here, sir," sternly uttered the recluse. "Speak plainer. You have some covert object in this talk; then tell it in plain words, that I may know how to answer you. This is no time for idle talk. Speak out, pray."

"I will, then. You know I told you I hed bin 'mongst the Delawares a good bit, in peace times. So I hev, an' I onceet hed a little influence over 'em, though it may not 'meant to much, now they're on the war-path, hot fer skelps. Yit I think I kin save your lives—yours an' her'n—ef you trust to me. I don't say 'at they'll let you go free, at fust, but I kin promise 'at you'll on'y be kept pris'ners ontel the trouble is over, or you kin buy yourself off. But I *know* I kin promise your *lives*," earnestly added Orem.

"How will you do it?"

"Jest this-a-way. I'll open the doors an' let 'em in. They may treat us a leetle rough, at fust, but when they see who I am, an' that we don't mean to make 'em any trouble, they'll let up."

"But you've fired upon them already?"

"Not at them—I didn't shoot to hit any thin', onlest neb-be 'twas the tree-tops on the lake, yonder. I grabbed your gun, to keep you from doin' it, for I counted on this plan. I knowed they was Delawares, from the fust yelp, an' thought we could do better'n to fight ag'in sech odds."

"Your actions are as strange as your words. How do I know you are not one of them—that you are not one of those accursed white renegades who consort with the savages?" suspiciously added Letcher, nervously fingering his rifle.

"Father!" cried Aries, springing between the two men, with a frightened glance at the flushed and angry countenance of the old hunter.

"You talk 'th a bitter tongue, fri'nd, an' 'thout thinkin' on you words," slowly uttered Orem. "What hev I did to make you think that? If I *was* one, what would 'a' bin easier 'n fer me to 'a' wiped you both out, while you sleeped? Or to 'a' kenned off your da'ter while you was out in the woods? Wouldn't I 'a' kep' you from comin' in here, a bit a o, ef I was a renegade? But I look over it—you don't mean what you say?"

"If I was wrong, I ask your pardon," added Letcher, more calmly. "But your words are strange. We are here in a stout cabin, and can defend ourselves. Then why open the way for those merciless devils to enter and slay us unresistingly? No! I will fight it out to the end, and die, if I must, as a man shou'll, weapon in hand."

"Think well on it, fast, fri'nd. Think what it 'd be, ef ef you rub out one on 'em, an' t'others git ye. Think o' her—what'll be *her* fate?"

"I do—I have. But she shall never fall into their power alive. Better death by a father's hand, than fall a captive to them. Agnes, darling, you wish this, too?"

"Yes—a thousand times, yes!"

The two met in a fervent embrace, while the grizzled hunter stood gazing upon them with strangely-conflicting emotions written upon his wrinkled visage. But then there settled over his face an expression of stern resolve.

"So be it, then! We'll do the best we know how, but you'll be sorry for't. I offer you the on'y chalice—ef you throw it away, it'll be your death."

"Say no more—I refuse your offer, once for all," sternly responded the recluse.

Con Orem turned toward his loophole, while Letcher did likewise. Agnes stood beside her father, and all were silent.

Not a sound broke the stillness without. The forest seemed deserted by all human life. But not one of the trio was deceived by this seeming security. They knew that their peril was never more imminent than now, though their gaze searched the woods in vain for some sign of their merciless foes.

Thus a few more minutes passed by, fraught with the most trying suspense. Thus doomed to inaction, while feeling as-

sured that their enemies were subtly planning their destruction, not knowing from which direction, or in what shape the blow would come, was indeed agonizing.

Then the suspicious silence without was broken, by a great variety of sounds. Calls of beasts and birds issued from the forest in every direction.

"What does that mean, Orem?" whispered Letcher.

"The Injuns—they're 'bout to make some move. 'Tain't too late yet—best let me talk to 'em," anxiously responded the old hunter.

Letcher vouchsafed no reply, but motioned Agnes to retreat into the fire-place, where there would be no danger of her being struck by a random bullet, in the strife that seemed near at hand.

"No, let me stay with you."

"You could do no good, and would only be in the way. Go, and be prepared for the worst. We will die together."

A rattling volley broke from the woods, aimed at the open loops, and Letcher had a narrow escape, one of the leaden missiles chipping a fragment from close beside his face. The evident object of the Indians was accomplished, for the whites drew back from their observatories.

Then came the sudden rushing of numerous feet, and as Letcher turned again to his loop, he beheld a body of red-skins burst from the forest and dash toward the cabin, bearing in their midst a heavy log, to be used as a battering-ram against the door. He uttered a low cry, and thrust his rifle-muzzle through the loophole.

But it was not discharged. A strong hand suddenly seized and twisted the weapon from his grasp; an attack from within!

At the same time a shrill yell rung in his ears—a war-whoop of the Delawares, similar to those that had been uttered by the red-skins in the forest. And following it came a second cry; one something similar, yet with a different intonation.

Letcher turned with a hoarse cry of mingled rage and surprise. Before him, with the rifle still in his hand, stood the old hunter, Con Orem!

"I'll save ye in spite o' your teeth!" the latter uttered, in a

distinct tone. " You shain't kill the gal 'th your bull-cussedness!"

The war-whoop had been scarcely less startling in its effect upon those outside. The Indians, who were rushing furiously toward the cabin-door, uttered exclamations of wondering surprise, and paused as with one accord, though still holding the raim, poised in their arms.

" You traitor—you are a renegade!" hissed the recluse, as he sprung toward Orem with clenched hands. " I'll kill you for this!"

" Father!" cried Agnes, and, as once before, she darted forward and interposed her frail form between the two men, thus strangely at odds.

" Easy, fri'nd," coolly added Orem, as he stepped aside, thus bringing himself nearer the door. " If you won't let me save you by your own free will, I'll do it ag'inst it, then. You've no call to ruinate others with yourself."

A peculiar cry now rung out from the savages, who still stood wondering; a cry that the old hunter evidently recognized, for he turned his head and once more pealed forth the two cries that had caused such a change in the state of affairs.

Then he sprung to the door and removed the upper bar. At this unmistakable token of his intentions, Letcher broke from the restraining arms of his daughter, and sprung upon the hunter, with a heavy knife glittering in his grasp.

" Drop that—drop it, you cowardly sneak!" hissed the recluse, in furious rage. " Drop it, I say, or I'll cut your black heart out of your body!"

A dangerous glow filled the gray eyes of the old hunter, at this deadly assault, and a dark scowl of anger swept athwart his face. As the bright steel flashed above his breast, he flung up an arm, catching Letcher's wrist upon it, and thus warded off the venomous blow.

" Thar—how d'y' like my way o' drappin' things?" Orem cried, as the heavy bar was uplifted by the massive right arm, then falling forcibly upon the head of the recluse, it felled him to the floor like a log.

" Oh! my father—you've killed him-- he's dead!" gasped Agnes, as she flung herself upon the prostrate form, and raising a hand as though to ward off another blow.

"No, he's on'y stunted. I must 'a' did it, or he'd 'a' killed me. I did it to save all our lives," hastily uttered Orem, as he removed the other bar, and flung the door wide open.

Another yell arose from the savages, and they sprung forward in eager haste. But then again they paused.

Con Orem stood there in the doorway, with a stern smile as of conscious security upon his face. A name broke from their lips, and they gazed wonderingly upon the gray-haired hunter.

Letcher now opened his eyes and stared confusedly around him. As he noted the open doorway and the astonished red-skins standing without, he sprang to his feet with a low cry. Orem made a gesture toward the Indians, then turned and confronted the recluse. There was a slightly contemptuous cadence in his tones, as he spoke.

"You see now that I didn't promus more'n I could do, don't ye? Now you jest keep quiet an' don't spile it all by none o' your foolishin'. If you do, an' make 'em mad, it'll be the death o' both you an' the gal. Are you willin' to let me work the job, or do *you* want to be boss? Speak quick."

"Let him, father," murmured Agnes, shrinking back from the fiercely admiring gaze of the red-men. "I believe he can do as he says."

"You're right, little 'un. I *kin* do't, an' I will fer your sake, though he sea'cely deserves it. What is it, then, *you*? Shell I or shain't I?"

"Yes—go on," muttered Letcher.

Orem turned again, and seeing the Indians were gradually drawing nearer, he motioned them back. They were regarding the proceedings with evident dissatisfaction, but this fact he affected not to observe.

"These braves follow you, Naheoma?" he uttered speaking in the Delaware dialect, and addressing a middle-aged warrior of grim aspect.

"Yes. What is it Red Fish wishes? A cloud is over the mind of the Delaware—he can not see clear," slowly replied the petty chief.

"It shall be lifted. But why are you here?"

"Does Red Fish ask? Surely he knows that our Great Father has promised to help the red-men drive the Long-

knives from the land of our fathers? Tecumseh says—go, kill scalp your enemies. We obey his words. The war-path lies long before us. Our weapons are thirsty for white blood. Our girdles are empty, because we have trod the war-path but a short time. See! here are two scalps—we will take them!" and the savage pointed toward Agnes and her father.

"No, that must not be. These people are my friends. They must not be harmed. They saved my life, and I will fight for them, if need be. You must kill me first, before you take their scalps. But think. What will the Great Chief say, when he asks you where Red Fish is, and you tell him that his friend died by your hand, defending those who had brought him back to life, when his feet were entering the long trail that leads to the happy hunting-ground? Will he be glad and say it is well? No! He will disgrace you—cut the totem from your breast and send you to hoe corn in the fields with the other squaws.

"Look! the woods are wide. There are the people of white blood, living on ground that your fathers owned, whose bones are turned up for the hogs to root at, by their iron plows. Go there. Kill them—take scalps—let white blood cover the level ground until you can paddle your canoes upon it, but do not harm these people. I will fight for them. They are my friends. I have spoken!"

The old hunter uttered these words with a fervor that was almost eloquence, and his every action was watched with absorbing interest by father and daughter, who, though they understood not his words, knew that he was interceding for their lives. Upon him now depended their only hope.

The keen eye of Con Oren scanned over the group of savages, and he saw that, though they were displeased, none among their number appeared willing to take upon himself the task of disputing his words. He added:

"Well, is it peace or war? If you do not fear the anger of your chief, come on. You can have their scalps—but you must take mine first. Which brave among you will lift his hand to strike the first blow at the heart of Red Fish?"

"No one. Red Fish has said these pale-faces were his friends, and that is enough. We will pass on. They may go free," coldly responded Nahcoma.

"It is well. We are still brothers. There is food in the lodge. Will my brothers rest and eat?"

"No. A Delaware thinks only of his enemies scalps when treading the war-trail."

Naheoma uttered a few brief commands to his braves, and then turning, strode rapidly toward the spot where their canoes were hidden. In a few moments the last Delaware had disappeared from view of those who still stood at the cabin.

Con Orem did not speak, but crouching down upon the door-step, deliberately proceeded to light his pipe. While thus occupied, his eyes were furtively glancing toward Letcher, who still stood near the threshold.

The face of the recluse betrayed a breast filled with strongly-conflicting emotions, but the words that struggled for utterance were choked back. But then he stepped forward and gazed steadily into the face of the old hunter.

Con Orem arose and returned the glance, unflinchingly. Agnes gazed at them, in half-alarm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE DELAWARE.

FRANCIS LETCHER was the first to break the silence, and his voice was troubled as he spoke.

"In the name of God, man, who are you?"

"Your fri'nd, I hope. Anyhow, that's what I want to be," responded the old hunter, drawing in short, quick puffs upon his pipe.

"Surely he is our friend; father," interrupted Agnes, earnestly. "He saved us from those terrible savages!"

"I know, but how? Who is he to have such great influence over them? He is of our own race, and should be an enemy, not a friend to them. I can not understand it!"

"Then don't try, fri'nd. Mebbe it's better fer us both that you don't. Let it go. I told you I had some 'fluence over

the Delawares, an' now you see I didn't lie. Jest take it fer what it's wuth, an' look on me as a fri'nd. Hain't I proved I was done?" uttered Orem, as Letcher fancied, uneasily.

"How do I know that it is all as it seems? Where have they gone? What did you tell them?"

"Didn't ye hear me?"

"I do not understand Delaware."

"I told 'em you two was my fri'nds, an' that ef they was bound to hev your skelps, they must take mine fust. They knowed should they do that, thar chief would be down on 'em heavy for't, an' so they left. But what's the use foolin'? Thar's other war-parties in the woods, an' the next that comes may not be any I know. Then whar'd we be? Rubbed out. Then le's travel fer the fort."

"Will you go with us?"

"Part way, as I told ye afore."

"You think there's danger of our meeting with other Indians?"

"I doubt so—cain't say fer shore, but it's likely. Never mind *that*. I'll see ye safe through. Come, be ye goin'?"

"No—not before night falls to cover our movements. I will not expose Agnes to such danger," firmly responded the recluse.

"Jes' listen! The man's crazy! Why, durn it all, man, you run ten times the danger *here* 'at you would in the woods. Thar, it'd be a chaintee meetin', while here, the reds know jest whar to look to find ye. Ef thar's another party 'ithin miles o' here, they'll call at the cabin—*bout* to, I tell ye. Lis'en to reason, an' take to the woods, while thar's a chaintee. It's all your lives is wuth to stay here," impatiently cried Con Orem.

"Here we have a chance to defend ourselves. In the woods, what could one man do, and he incumbered with a helpless child? Nothing. It would be certain death. I will stay here," was Letcher's resolute reply.

"Look a-here, man, you fa'rly make me sick 'ith sech talk. If you was alone, durn me ef I wouldn't let you go to the devil in your own way. I wouldn't bother my head 'bout ye no longer. Sech a pesky, unreasonable fool hedn't orter live, nohow. But thar's *she*. She saved my life--fer I must 'a'

bled to death, soon, on'y fer her findin' me. I won't see her kerflummixed thet way. I tell you, man, ef you trust to me, I'll take you clean through, though all the Injuns 'twixt here an' the salt water shed stand afore us. They won't dar' cross my will—not one on 'em; not even Tecumseh hisself. I didn't know to tell ye, but you driv me to it. I wanted Miss, ne'er, to think o' me as a man she could like an' pray fer, as a 'f'nd. But you're so durned contrary!"

There were strangely mingled feelings in this speech, and the countenance of the grizzled hunter worked curiously. It was evident how sorely he dreaded to cast off the mask he had worn before Agnes.

"Who are you?—I ask you again. Tell me the truth. Who are you that can make such promises?" uttered the recluse, in a strained tone, his hand tightening its grasp upon the rifle he had regained, and an expression of suspicion written upon his countenance.

"I'm George Girty—Red Fish, the Delawares call me," was the reply, and the massive frame straightened and a glow of conscious power overspread the weatherbeaten face.

A cry of horror broke alike from the lips of father and daughter. Instinctively they shrank back, and the recluse half-raised his rifle.

George Girty! The synonym of all that was cruel, blood-thirsty and ferocious! The name of a renegade whose deeds of murder and rapine rendered him no less infamous in the North-western States than those of his brothers, Simon and James Girty.

The renegade stood erect and motionless, but the glow faded from his eyes, and an expression of sadness took its place, as he noted the glance of horror and loathing cast upon him by Agnes, who clung trembling to the arm of her father. It showed that human nature was not entirely dead within him; that under different circumstances he might have been a good and true hearted man, instead of the infamous apostate that history has recorded with a blood-red stain.

"My God! and we have been harboring such a demon? We have eaten and drank with you—Girty, the renegade!" gasped Letcher, in horror.

"An' hed both your lives saved by him—why don't yo add

thet, too?" bitterly retorted Girty, his face glowing and his entire frame quivering with ill-suppressed anger, at the intense loathing expressed by Letcher. "On'y fer *thet* same cussed renegade, you'd 'a' both bin dead an' cold afore this. I wonder the airth don't open an' swaller ye up, 'ca'se you was wicked enough to be saved by *sech* a devil!"

"You saved us from them that we might become *your* prey — but you will be foile! I will kill you first!" cried the recluse, as he threw forward his rifle.

"Thar—don't shoot. See—I don't offer to 'fend myself. I want to be your friend," hastily uttered Girty, raising one hand, but making no other effort to avert the threatened doom.

"*You—a friend!*"

"You act like a *man, you* do, I must say, to taunt a feller when you know *thet* he won't hurt ye, ef on'y fer *her* sake. On'y fer her, I'd kill ye like I would a mad wolf, fer those words. But you're *her* father. The on'y white person, sence my mother died, *thet* has spoken a kind word to me, or treated me like a human critter. I cain't forget *that*. You kin raise your gun an' plug me, ef you will. I won't try to hinder ye. To save my life, I wouldn't lift a finger aginst ye now."

Letcher hesitated. The man's words affected him strangely. He could not shoot him down, though he knew he had deserved death ten thousand times over. It looked too much like murder.

Girty stood moodily looking upon them, his pipe upon the ground at his feet. The brutal, ferocious renegade appeared strangely altered from his usual self.

"No, I will not harm you now. You saved our lives. But go. I trust we may never meet again, but if we do, the past must be forgotten, I will shoot you down at sight. Go now, while it is time," sternly said Letcher.

"Wait, a bit. I will go, but I must say a few words first. I don't want *her* to think me *sech* a devil as men paint me, though I know, I've bin bad enough, m'hey did a heap o' thin's that I hadn't order, m'be. But that's some excuse. I wouldn't say so to any one but her, but that's somethin' in them eyes an' in that face, which tetches my heart, an' makes me a nother sort o' man, altogether," and the voice of the renegade audibly trembled, as he spoke.

"But lis'en," he continued, in a more steady voice. "Ef I'd hed a better show, when I was young, mebbe I'd 'a' turned out a dif'rent sort o' man. Luck went dead ag'in' me from the very fust. The Injuns captured me, with the rest, when I was a little bit o' a shaver, sea'cely knee-high. The old man was tortured at the fire-stake, an' then we boys was scattered all over. The Delawares tuck me; Sim, he fell to the Senecas, an' Jim to the Shawnees. Tom got away an' went back to Pensylvany.

"Jest think how it 'd be, yourself. I was raised with the Injuns ontill I 'most fergot I was ever white. I was l'arnt to look on the pale-faces as my nat'r'l enemies, an' that my duty, when I growed big enough, was to kill 'em on sight. With sech teachin', what else could you expect? You'd 'a' turned out jest the same. They was my people—all I hed. I came to be a Injun, an' fight as the Injuns did, nat'ally.

"I tuck a wife, when I was old enough, an' she hed a fet-tle boy, an' then a little gal. I loved 'em all, fit to kill. I'd 'a' died fer 'em, ruther'n hed one ha'r o' thar heads hurt. But what was the eend? We lived on a island in Erie, by ourselves. I was gone one day, huntin', an' left 'em alone, fer 'twas peace times, an' I didn't think o' harm to them.

"Wal, I kem back, I found my lodge burnt down, an' the three dead—skelped! I found the trail. It was a white man who'd did it. I sot out an' follered it, an' never stopped to rest or eat a bite, entel I'd run him to airth. I tuck his skelp—an' the skelps he'd raised from my squaw an' the little ones.

"The gover'ment made a big fuss over it, I was s'peeted, an' though they couldn't show any thin' ag'inst me, they tied me up an' whipped me like a dog. Then they cropped my right ear, an' turned me loose. Was I to be a better fri'nd to them then afore? Was I to go to 'em like a dog what licks the hand that hits him, an' fight my people—the on'y ones that hed ever treated me like a man?

"No! I swore blood ag'inst all white people, an' ontel this day, I've kep' my oath. I break it now, fer *her* sake. She's made me more o' a white man than I ever b'lieved I could be. Ef I hed sech as she to keer fer me, I could settle down to a life o' peace an' honest ways."

The renegade paused. His tones as he uttered the last

words were greatly altered from the hard ringing tones with which the brief synopsis of his life had been detailed. A yearning look filled his eyes, as they rested upon the pale countenance of Agnes.

"Well, what matters this to us? You are what you are, and as such we must regard you, even though you have rendered us a great service. But as for our being *friends*—never! I would rather, by far, herd with the mangy curs that fill your wigwams, than to lower myself to your level by professing friendship for Girty, the renegade."

Letcher uttered these words in a tone of intense abhorrence. Girty's face flushed hotly, then turned to a ghastly pallor, as he once more turned his gaze upon Agnes.

"An' you—do you say the same?" he uttered, speaking with evident difficulty.

"No—but go. I would never meet you again. You have saved us, but I could only think of your dreadful crimes while you were before me. Go—leave us alone," shuddered Agnes.

"Think—on'y think fust what you kin do. Think what a kind word hes did for me, already, an' what more on 'em may do. You kin make jest what you want to out o' me. You kin make me an honest white man ag'in, or you kin turn me into a bigger devil than I ever dreamed of. It's in your hands. Think better on it—do."

Girty spoke in a low but earnest tone, and his eyes dwelt beseechingly upon the countenance of the fair young maiden. But a broad glare of blood seemed to intervene between them, and Agnes clung tremblingly to her father's arm.

"No—go. It sickens me. It is all red—red like blood! The blood of widows' and orphans' dear ones, that you have shed. Go—leave us!"

"You hear?" sternly added Letcher, as he stepped before Agnes. "Go, before I forget what you have done to serve us, in remembrance of your past life. And after to-day, remember we are sworn enemies."

"Very well. So be it, then. You've choosed, an' must bide by it, an' what it brings with it. But you'll regret it—yas, you will, shore! I wanted to be your fri'nd—yours an' ker'n, but you won't hav it so. You'd rather hav my immity.

So you shell. I give you ontil sun goes down. Then I'll be after you, an' the best man wins. Do as you please, ontel then. Go to the fort, ef so be you wish. I won't hinder ye. But by the blood o' my murdered squaw an' babies, I swear the I'll kill you an' her, afore another moon. I won't be a milk-an'-water fool no longer. I'll be as I war afore thi—Girty, the renegade, who he made more blood flow—white blood—than ary other man in the States."

"There—another word and I'll shoot you like a dog! Go—I say go!" angrily cried Letcher, as he nervously fingered his rifle.

"So I will—but 'member. Ontel the sun sets—no longer," impishly added Girty, as he turned and strode toward the forest.

But he had not made a half-score steps, when two forms sprung from a belt of bushes before him, and rapidly approached. They bore rifles, and these were half-poked, their muzzles bearing full upon his figure.

He paused abruptly, as if bewildered by this new piece. The interview with the recluse and his daughter had evidently greatly unnerved the renegade, and he seemed undecided what move to make, until it was too late.

"Hold! there—not a step further, on your life!" rung out a clear, commanding voice. "Stop! touch that rifle and I'll bore ye with a half-inch bullet!"

This threat was promptly seconded by the grim muzzle staring Girty full in the face, and even then he could see that there was no indecision in the full blue eye that glamed along the short tube. And beside the speaker was another figure, in a similar attitude.

"Who the devil air you--what d'y' mean, anyhow?" snarled Girty, his eyes roving around for some loophole by which he might escape from his perilous situation.

"A friend to all honest men—but I greatly doubt, from what I heard you utter a bit ago, whether you can be placed in that category. It is *my* turn now—who are *you*?"

"It's the renegade—it's George Girty!" cried Letcher, springing forward.

A simultaneous exclamation burst from the lips of the newcomers, and a fierce oath grated through Girty's clenched

teeth. He saw that only prompt and desperate action could free him from the gathering toils.

He sprung to one side, thus carrying his body out of range of the leveled rifles, and flung up his own gun. But he had to deal with men quite as active and prompt as himself.

"Take him, Sam!" shouted the first speaker, as he sprung forward.

The rifle of the renegade was discharged, but without effect, though its contents almost grazed the head of his youngest antagonist, and then, ere he could draw another weapon, the tall man, called Sam, was upon him.

Uttering a bitter, snarling curse, Girty struck out viciously with his clenched fist, and the man reeled back, staggered and confused by its effects. But then the heavy rifle-barrel of the other fell with crushing force upon the bowed head of Girty, felling him to the ground, bleeding and senseless.

"No—stop, Sam. Don't ill-use a helpless man, even though he be a renegade. Bind his hands and feet, though. He's worth more to us alive than dead."

"Jest so—a big feather in our cap, to tote him into the Fort. The men 'll all thank us, an' the wimmen 'll be jest ready to kiss us plum to pieces, fer this. Whoop-ee! heerraw fer us!" excitedly cried the lank scout, as with dexterous skill his nimble fingers secured Girty with his own belt.

"You say this man is George Girty?" asked the other; a young man dressed in a neat woodsman's garb, somewhat fancifully ornamented, addressing Letcher, at the same time politely doffing his cap to Agnes.

"Yes, he boasted as much to us, himself. But I will tell you the whole thing, and then you can judge whether 'tis true or false," said Letcher.

Then he hastily ran over the events before the reader.

"So—so," thoughtfully muttered the young ranger. "He is a rich prize, indeed! Depend on it, he will never trouble you again. We will take good care that he has no chance to make good his oath, Mr.—"

"Letcher—Francis Letcher, and this is my only child, Agnes."

The young scout bowed politely to Agnes, and there was

an unmistakable glow of admiration in his fine eyes, as he noted her grace and beauty.

"My name is Oscar Jewett, and I act as a scout to the forces at Detroit. This is a brother ranger, Sam Hill."

That lank worthy arose from beside Girty, and gave a short bob of the head, first toward Agnes and then toward her father.

* "How d'ye? Glad to see ye—fact!"

As hinted, he was a tall, lank-looking man, garbed in a well-worn suit of buck-skin, carrying the usual weapons of a borderer. His face was thin and smooth-shaven, of a grave, stolid cast, only relieved by the humorous twinkle of the small blue eyes.

His companion was greatly different, in appearance. In figure, of the average height, compactly yet gracefully built, evincing great activity and a good share of muscular strength. In dress a sort of forest dashingly, his boyish face still evinced a more than ordinary share of courage and intrepidity. His beardless cheek was smooth and fair almost as that of Agnes, herself, though a slight silken mustache darkened his curved upper lip. His hair was rather long, curling, coal-black as the raven's plumage.

He seemed one little fit for friendships or peaceful situations, but his past life contradicted this, even had not his present office told us much. It was not likely that a man holding the position of chief of scouts, would be deficient in either courage or skill.

"Will you not enter the cabin, gentlemen, and rest? While we can then discuss this affair at our ease," said Letcher.

"Thanks; we will do so with pleasure. Since setting out, yesterday morning, from the fort, our fare has been of the scantiest. I must confess to being ravenously hungry, and I know Sam, there, is the same."

"Aint I? Just my me—deet's all!" cried Hill, merrily.

"Our fare is of the plainest, but such as it is—"

"I beg of you, no apologies. Sam, bring that beauty along with you. I don't care to run any risks of his slipping up this time."

"He looks like a dead man—I fear you have killed him!" shuddered Agnes.

"No—he is only stunned, though I did strike him pretty hard. He will come to in a little while."

The two men, preceded by Agnes, turned and entered the house. Sam Hill grasped the sick, half-easible renegade by the collar, and unmercifully dragged him up to the doorstep, where he crouched down beside him, as though fearful lest the coming renegade should still, by some strange means, escape from their hands. The lank youth mentally swore that if so, 'twould be from no fault of his.

CHAPTER V.

FOILED.

"You have been scouting, Mr. Jewett," observed Letcher, as they seated themselves, while Agnes bustled around to prepare a hasty meal.

"Well, yes, after a manner. We have been out warning the settlers that war has been declared with Great Britain, and that the Indians are up to their old tricks once more. We were on our return as we came by here. Seeing fresh Indian signs hand by, we crept up to feel our way, when a few words uttered by that wretch caught my ear. I believed he was an enemy, and so blocked him, as you know."

While speaking, the eyes of the young ranger were often fixed upon the lithe, graceful figure of Agnes, as she glided to and fro, then aught else, and he, too, stole more than one shy glance at this forest Adonis. But there seemed to be something in his dark eye that strangely confused her, for her head drooped, and a soft flush crimsoned her cheek.

"Stay, O sir, this imp he woke up," called out Sam Hill. "Looks jest's though he'd lost somethin' an' couldn't find it."

Letcher and Jewett stepped to the door, and glanced at the renegade. His form was propped in a sitting attitude against the pane, and before him crouched the lank ranger.

As Girty heard the footsteps, he turned his head so that he could see the two men, and a wild glare filled his blood-shot eyes. His face became frightfully distorted, and he gnashed his teeth like a maddened wolf.

"Cuss you—cuss you fer a sneakin' liar!" he snarled, darting a fiery, vindictive glance at the recluse. "This is what I saved ye fer, is it? This is how you keep your word! Ah! ef I was on'y free fer a minnit—jest one minnit—I wouldn't ax any more. I'd tar your black heart out o' your body!"

"I did not raise a hand against you," coldly uttered Letcher.

"But ye told my name—it's jest the same. But I'll be even with ye yet, I swar I will. I'll kill you—I'll put a thousand deaths in ere, an' make ye wish you'd niver bin born. You an' her, too, now. I hate her like I do you, ca'se she's *your* da'ter. I'll—"

"Stop his foul mouth, Sam," cried Oscar.

"No—let him rave. He can do no harm," contemptuously said Letcher.

"Yes, let me tell him what I think o' him, then do as you please 'th me. I saved his life—bigger fool me for doin' it! —an' this is how he pays me! But listen. I niver yet swore a oath that I didn't keep, cl'er through. I niver yet hed a grudge that I didn't wipe out, sooner or later. I will *this* one, too. You fellers think you've got me safe, but don't b'lieve it. I'll git free—I know it, I'm *boun'* to. I couldn't go under ontel I've paid him up!"

"But your life is at our mercy, man. What is to hinder us from shooting you now, and thus break all hope of your escaping?"

"Bec'dse you'd rather take me to Detroit a pris'ner. You'll try it, but I'll fool ye. I tell ye I'll have revenge on him. I'll kill him. I'll take the gal, an' she shall be my wife."

"Stop! utter another word like that and I'll tar you!" hotly cried Jewett, as Agnes uttered a cry of alarm.

"I've said it all—all it en' wore it, too. Mind me—it'll come true—every word on it," coolly added Girty; then his head sank upon his chest, and he gazed fixedly upon the forest beyond.

"Mr. Letcher," said Oscar, as they turned from the door "you will go with us to the Post?"

"I dare not, in the daytime. I fear for *her*. I thought I would wait here until night, and then try it by water. I think they left my canoe."

"It might be better. The forest is full of the red rascals, and a lady would be silly out of place there. But if you will risk it, you can depend upon our assistance."

"No, I will wait. But come, sit up, help yourselves freely. I will go and see if they left my boat."

"I'll take my grub out here, Oscar, ef it's all the same. I don't like to lose sight o' this imp, an' he'd p'ison the house ef we bring him inside. He would so!" said Sam.

In a few moments Letcher returned, wearing an uneasy expression upon his countenance. He stated that his canoe had disappeared, no doubt having been carried off by the party of Delawares whom Girty had disappointed of their coveted prey.

"That settles it, then. Miss Agnes can not make so long and difficult a journey through the forest. It would kill her. You must wait here until I can return with a party from the fort. By brisk traveling we can get back here by daybreak, if not before. You say he order'd the Indians off, so *they* will not return, and 'tis not likely that a second party will chance by this place so soon. I do not think the danger will be very great," thoughtfully observed Jewett.

"Wat, ef we're to do all that, 'pears to me we'd better be travelin'. It's a long road, an' wehev *him* to take keer of," interrupted Hill.

"You're right, Sam. Well, then, it is fully understood? You are to await us here?"

"Yes, it is best so, I think. I would not ask this trouble of you, only for *her*. She is all that is left me, now?" uttered Letcher, in an agitated tone.

"A pleasure, not a trouble, I assure you," cheerfully added Oscar. "But you had better keep the cabin closed, and do not let any thing throw you off your guard. Depend on it, we will not fail you."

"How'll we manidge the imp, Oscar?"

"Untie his feet and make him walk. He can not escape us."

Chuckles grimly, the lank scout took the strap thus loosened and looped it around Girty's neck, holding fast to one end. In obedience to a significant jerk, the renegade rose to his feet, and cast a glance of defiance upon his captors.

"No crooked looks, *ef* you please, mister. 'Tain't good manners - durned *ef* 'tis. Must break yourself o' the habit. Git hurt, some time, mebbe, *ef* ye don't."

"Member what I told ye!" snarled Girty, casting a venomous glance at the recluse.

"I will remember it longer than *you* will, I hope—for a very good reason," retorted Letcher, significantly.

The two scouts renewed their pledge, and then strode away, driving their prisoner before them. As they entered the forest, Oscar turned and waved his hand toward the cabin, while a pleased smile lighted up his han'some countenance as the salute was returned by Agnes and her father.

"A fine couple! She's almost an angel!" muttered Jewett, half-unconsciously.

"I don't know 'bout *that*, Oscar, but I *do* know thet she gits up all-fired nice grub. I'd like to hev her fer a cook all the time. I would so!" was the unsentimental reply of Hill.

"Pshaw! that's a ~~nice~~ way to speak of a lady, Sam," rather touchily said Jewett.

"Senibler'n what *you* said 'bout angels an' sech like, anyhow."

Girty strode on doggedly, though at a fair pace, in spite of his bruised limb, which troubled him somewhat. But he knew that his captors were not men to stand on trifles, and that they would not hesitate about using harsher measures, should he prove obstinate.

Still he did not give up hopes of eluding them. As he had said, he firmly believed that he would escape this peril, and live to be revenged upon the man who had delivered him up to a shameful death, after being preserved from almost certain destruction by his interference.

Toward that one end, then, his every thought was turned. But it seemed a fruitless hope. His captors were keenly upon the alert, and Sam Hill watched him as closely as a cat watches a mouse.

In one hand he held the leather belt, that encircled the ren-

egade's throat, and Jewett kept an eye upon his motions, while gliding along a little to one side. In this manner they threaded the forest for over an hour, without any event worthy of note.

They were now some little distance from the lake shore, and the forest was of a more open nature, with less dense undergrowth. Oscar Jewett abruptly paused, with a low exclamation.

"What's up now?" muttered Hill, tightening his grip upon the belt and bringing Girty to an abrupt stand-still.

"Indian sign—fresh and plenty of it."

"Tact's so—made not more'n a hour ago, nuther," grunted Sam, as he keenly scrutinized the ground, where were the unmistakable imprints of numerous mocassined feet.

The trail lay at almost right angles with the course they were pursuing, as the Indians had seemingly left the lake directly behind them. The party was evidently a large one, though having passed in single file.

The two scouts interchanged significant glances. Girty observed these, and laughed; a low but triumphant chuckle. There was exultation in his voice, as he spoke:

"They're Delawares—my people. How long do ye think ye kin keep out o' thar hands?"

"What in thunder tickles *your* fancy, so pesky much—say?" testily demanded Sam Hill. "Spose we *do* fall in 'th them, what use 'll it be to *you*, I'd like to know? They'll never do *you* no good—be sure o' that. Ain't it so, Oscar?"

"Yes. Keep close to him and be ready to strike. If we have to run for it, make sure work of him, first. If we can not manage to take him in alive, we'll leave him so he'll do us no more mischief, at any rate."

"What d'y' mean be that?" sullenly demanded Girty.

"You are very dull of comprehension, my good fellow. I mean just this. We'll take you into the fort, if two men can do it. But if not—if your friends make us any trouble, it will be so much the worse for you. At the first sign of it, down you go. That moment you die," sternly added the young scout.

Girty did not make any reply to this threat, but subsided into sullen silence. He saw that his feeling of exultation

had been premature, or at least its expression ill-timed, and that it had only wrought him ill, by deepening the resolution of his captors.

"Sam," added Oscar, "do you keep your eyes upon him now, more closely than ever. Leave me to attend to the rest. I'll go ahead and if we are likely to have trouble, will give you warning in time for you to fire on him. You know the signals—be on the look-out for them."

Jewett, after carefully inspecting the condition of his rifle, glided forward and maintained a lead of a few yards. After him came Sam Hill, driving Girty as before.

"Now mind ye, my fine feller," continued the lank scout. "No foolishin', fer I won't stand it. You jest move on decently, an' don't try to smash *every* stick that we chinee to pass 'ithin sight o', with them mud scows o' your'n. I'm naturally good-natured, but don't ye make me mad—if you do, you'll be mighty apt to git *hurt*. You will *so!*!"

Under the circumstances, Girty could do no less than obey his guard, for already had he felt the sharp point of Sam's knife, and he knew that an exhibition of obstinacy might call forth such an application as would effectually put an end to his career.

The fears of the two scouts appeared to be without foundation, for they progressed rapidly, without hearing or seeing any thing further of their enemies. As their spirits rose, that of their captive sunk correspondingly, for every moment was carrying him nearer to his enemies, and lessening the chances of his meeting with friends.

When the sun went down, nearly half the long journey was accomplished, and the brother scouts were congratulating each other upon their good fortune. But they were speedily given evidence that they had not left all danger behind them, as they had fondly hoped.

They had decided not to pause for either food or rest, until at their journey's end, fully appreciating the importance of running no unnecessary risk, while having in charge a prisoner of such importance. And, despite Girty's growlings, for he in reality suffered acutely from his injured leg, they pressed rapidly on.

They were only a short distance from the lake shore, and

Jewett, as usual, was a little ways in advance. He abruptly paused and crouched down behind a clump of bushes, gazing intently before him.

Sam Hill noted this action, and promptly drew his knife, holding it in readiness for an instant blow. But the time for that had not yet come.

"Bring him along, Sam," whispered Oscar, in a tone barely audible to his comrade. "I fear there's breakers ahead!"

The clump of bushes surmounted a little knoll, and commanded a tolerably fair view for a little distance along the lake shore. Not far from the water's edge, yet nearly a quarter of a mile ahead of our friends, a faint, ruddy glow was visible, that could only be produced by a campfire built in the forest.

"Mebbe it's some o' the other boys, who was sent out like we was," suggested Sam.

"Hardly. They know the savages too well. More like it's a camp of Indians, though why they encamp this early, while on the war-path, puzzles me. It's not their nature," muttered Jewett.

"Wal, what do you mean to do now?"

"I must go and learn what it means. It won't do to run any unnecessary risks. You stay here and keep him safe. If he ventures to cry out, kill him. I'd rather lose a hand than have him escape us now."

"No danger o' that. I hain't *quite* a fool, yit. But better go, ef that's the trail. We hain't got much daylight to burn."

"I will. You can see the shore yonder, opposite the light. If it's any of our boys, I'll go there and show a light, so that we won't lose time. You can bring him safe that far, alone. If it is a red-skin fire, as I more than half believe, I will find out the best way to pass them, and meet you here. But mind him; he's a cunning rascal, and may be at some of his tricks."

"Don't fret 'bout me. I kin manidge the imp. Ef he breathes louder'n a whisper, rip goes my sticker clean through his gizzard. Make haste as quick as you kin now."

Jewett turned and glided away into the forest, displaying a rare degree of skill in so silently threading the tangled

woods. From infancy the wilderness had been his home, and he had attained a point of proficiency in woodcraft exceedingly rare in one so youthful.

A few minutes carried him over the greater portion of the distance, and then he proceeded with more care. Already he could distinguish the glow of the firelight, and even fancied he could hear the low hum of voices in conversation, above the sighing of the wind among the treetops.

Now prostrate upon the ground, Jewett slowly crawled forward, his progress as silent and wary as that of a serpent, and finally he gained a point from whence he could command a fair view of the camp-ground, as he crouched low down behind a thick, scrubby bush. Through the leafy twigs he peered out upon the wild scene spread before his eyes.

Oscar saw that his suspicions were realized; that this was indeed the camp-fire of a war-party of Indians. And then his eyes eagerly drank in the details of the scene.

The fire was built in a small glade, surrounded by bushes and trees. Through a small opening in these, the young scout had fortunately obtained a glimpse of it.

Surrounding this small fire, were fully a score of half-naked forms, painted with true savage idea of beauty, with bright-colored dyes. A glance sufficed to tell Jewett that he beheld a war-party of Delawares.

He saw, too, that they had been engaged in strife, whose severity was evidenced by more than one wound, rudely bandaged with leaves. And, here and there, dangling from the wampum girdles, he noted a number of still gory scalps, whose long, fine hair, or short, curling locks of a light hue, told but too plainly that they had recently adorned the heads of white people: men, women and babes.

Several of the party seemed engaged in an animated and not over amicable discussion, though carried on in such low tones that Oscar, though a master of the dialect, could not at first divine the cause of dispute. But he speedily learned it, and the sight filled his heart with horror and indignation.

One of the savages darted from the circle and disappeared amidst a clump of bushes, reappearing in a few moments, dragging with him another figure. It was slight and frail, apparently terror-stricken.

A cry rose to Jewett's lips, as he distinguished the face and figure of a young white girl. His rifle rose to his cheek, but then was lowered, undischarged.

He was helpless—he could do nothing. To interfere now would only result in certain destruction, both to himself and friend, involving, as well, the loss of their prisoner. He could only wait, hoping for something to turn up that would enable him to strike a blow for the stranger maiden, with some faint hope of a good result.

The savage rudely dragged the girl up to where the others stood, and uttered a few sharp words. Then, quick as thought, there came a glittering flash—a dull, sickening *thud*, followed by a heavy fall upon the earth!

Oscar uttered an involuntary cry of horror, but fortunately for him, this was drowned by a hoarse yell from one of the Indians; a yell of angry rage. And for a brief interval there seemed a prospect for a pitched battle among the dusky demons.

But the one who had so summarily settled the dispute between the rival warriors, was their chief, and at a word from his lips, the others ranged beside him, confronting the two disappointed braves. This quelled the mutiny, and the chief coolly appropriated the scalp of the murdered girl to himself, probably regarding it as his fee for acting as judge.

All this transpired so quickly that the young scout could not have interposed, had he been so foolhardy. Ere he comprehended the real purport of the chief's speech, the bloody deed was consummated.

Though he felt an almost uncontrollable desire to avenge the ill-fated maiden, Oscar subdued his feelings, remembering that he owed a duty to the living, greater than that to the dead, who were already beyond earthly aid. He saw there were no more captives, and felt that his only course was to retreat as quickly as possible from his perilous position, where a chance glance might at any moment discover him.

Slowly and cautiously, by almost imperceptible degrees, Oscar worked his way backward from the bush that had afforded him shelter, bending toward the lake shore, until the camp-fire was hidden from his view. The broad expanse of water lay before him.

Upon the bank he noted the dusky outlines of several canoes, of different sizes, but he dared not attempt stealing them. Then arising, he glided rapidly away in the gloom, heading toward the spot where he had left his comrade in charge of the captive renegade.

His breath came quick and hard, and his entire frame quivered with horror, as he recalled the fiendish murder he had so lately witnessed. It seemed as though he was in a manner guilty of the maiden's death, for not having dared all in a desperate attempt to save her.

In a few minutes Jewett neared the spot where he had left Sam Hill, and pausing, he uttered the signal—a low whistle, ending in a peculiar quaver, that was one of the calls in common use among the American scouts. To Oscar's surprise, there came no answer to this.

Again he uttered the signal, but naught answered him. All was still, save the never-ending murmur of the breeze playing through the lofty treetops.

A feeling of wondering alarm seized upon the young ranger. Why this strange and continued silence? Surely he had not mistaken the spot!

"No—it's the place. Then what is the matter? Can he have left it? Can there have been other Indians by here, so close as to drive him away? Or can it be—"

At this thought Jewett uttered a low cry and darted forward. He half feared that the cunning renegade had indeed kept his boast, and by some means succeeded in effecting an escape.

And yet this seemed impossible, bound as he was, and in the custody of a trusty scout, wary and keen-witted. And Sam Hill full well knew the importance of his captive, and would endanger his safety by no foolish negligence.

Jewett sprung forward and stood beside the clump of bushes, where he had left his loved comrade. As he did so, a cry of horror and anguish burst from his lips, and he reeled back, sick at heart.

The moon shone down brightly, and through a rift in the treetops, flooded the spot with a clear light. It revealed a ghastly scene.

A dead man lay there, his white, ghastly face upturned,

his staring eyes filled with a look of horror and deadly anguish. The gory breast and throat showed how he came by his end. A knife thrust to the heart, another slash that had almost severed the head from its trunk. And the silvery light revealed the gory skull, from which had been torn the scalp.

It was the body of honest Sam Hill, dead and scalped. And George Girty, the renegade, was missing!

He had indeed made his boast good!

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

SAM HILL and George Girty crouched there under shelter of the bush, side by side, as Oscar Jewett left them to learn the meaning of the forest camp-fire. The gaze of both men was riveted upon the ruddy light.

Sam held a drawn knife in one hand, while the other gripped the shoulder of the renegade, ready to fulfill his threat, and Girty was seemingly resigned to his fate, as though confident that an attempt at escape could only result in his own ill.

But for all that, he was not idle, nor had he been so cowed as his captors believed, for hours past. During all that time, but more especially since the sun set, and the gray shades of night settled down upon the earth, he had been busy, paving the way for his escape.

He was a cunning man, and not one to ruin himself by precipitate action. But now, as Oscar departed, he felt that the time had come for him to put his project into execution, if ever.

His arms had been bound with the stout leather strap that formerly supported his powder-horn and bullet-pouch by his side. This confined his elbows, and then twined around until it was tied at his wrists, thus forming bonds seemingly impossible for him to remove, unaided.

But he knew the strap, and worked accordingly. As he walked along, he brought to bear a gradual strain upon it at his elbows, and finally felt his perseverance rewarded by the pliable, greased strap slipping until it became quite loose.

Then he worked in the same manner upon his wrists, so dexterously that though beneath the very eye of Sam Hill, his actions were not suspected. Thus, when the pause was made as ordered, at the bush, he was nearly ready for action.

Dexterously he completed his work. He made a sudden change in his position, and at the same time strained desperately upon his bands.

He felt the knot slip, and then the strap slowly settled down over his wrists. This *ruse* had prevented Sam from noting the sudden exertion, and now a silent notion would free his hands entirely.

"Look here, *you!*" muttered Hill, giving his captive a slight shake by way of emphasis. "Mind now—quit your durned foolin', keep still, or I'll hurt ye, now."

The shake had entirely freed Girty, and as he closely clenched his hands, he uttered in a low tone:

"I didn't mean it—my knee slipped. But look! ain't that the light he said he'd show?"

"Whar—I don't see it?" and as he spoke, Hill leaned eagerly forward.

"*H-a-ah!*"

A fierce, snarling cry broke from Girty's lips, as he flung his arms around and dealt the incantous scoundrel a double blow full upon the neck, dashing him forward through the bush. The bared knife fell from his nerveless grasp, and lay in the limpid moonlight, shining like a bar of silver.

One hand of the renegade clutched the throat of his late captor, while with the other he secured the weapon. And then ensued a struggle for life or death, brief, though fierce and desperate.

Sam Hill, rallying from the stupefying blow, exerted his strength to free his throat from the choking grasp, rolling quickly over upon his back. His bony fists struck fiercely up at the hideous face of the maledened renegade, but all was in vain.

The glittering weapon uprose, and then swiftly shot down,

fairly over the ill-fated scout's heart, sinking to the very hilt with the force of the revengeful blow.

A gurgling gasp broke from his lips, and his grasp relaxed. One great quiver of the muscular frame was all. He was dead!

But the infuriated renegade was not content with this. The heavy blade fell once more, and almost severed the dead man's head from his body.

Then the scalp was torn off, and George Girty sprung to his feet, a free man once more! As he swung the reeking trophy aloft, he could scarce refrain from uttering a shrill yell of exultation, but prudence restrained him. He knew not but what the camp-fire was built by whites, and consequently enemies to him.

Stooping, Girty recovered the weapons and ammunition of his victim; and then with a fiendish chuckle, turned and glided away from the spot of death. He kept a keen look-out for the returning scout, as he glided toward the light, in case the fire had been built by Indians, and had he met Oscar Jewett, there would have been another murder committed that night.

But, as already shown, they did not meet. The young scout had come almost directly along the lake shore, while Girty very nearly followed the same route along which Jewett had passed while reconnoitering.

Thus it came that Oscar was greeted with such a tragic sight. And the blow was very bitter to him, for he had learned to love the rude, uncouth, but kind and true-hearted scout, Sam Hill.

Perhaps it was fortunate that a startling interruption came just then, for it aroused the young scout to a sense of his own peril, and the duty that still lay before him. It came in a quick, wild yell, or series of yell, from behind him, evidently from the Indian camp.

Oscar started as though awakened from a horrible nightmare. He knew right well what had caused this outcry. Girty had no doubt reached the spot, and warned the savages of the proximity of a foe.

"Poor Sam!" muttered Jewett, in a broken tone. "I must leave you, but I swear revenge for this--I will have it, or lay down my own life in the attempt!"

For a moment he deliberated, undecided what course to pursue. He knew that Girty would spare no pains to effect either his capture or death, and that every moment he remained there, but rendered his peril the greater.

"I can leave them, easily enough," he muttered, in an undecided tone. "But that is not all. They heard our plans, and will try to foil them. If I go on to the Post, can we return in time to do any good? No. Let will never do! They depend upon me—I will not fail them."

A plan, bold and daring, yet presenting a fair prospect of success, was shaping itself in the young ranger's mind, while still alert to the threatening danger. The yell of the Indians had ceased, and the forest was still, seemingly deserted by all human life, but Oscar was not deceived by this. He knew that his foes, led by George Girty, were searching for him.

"I'll do it—it's the best plan. She can never make the trip on land," suddenly resolved Jewett, and then he set about carrying out his plan.

He turned and glided into the woods, rapidly leaving the lake shore behind him, exerting his utmost skill to avoid making a noise that might possibly betray him to his bloodthirsty foes. And for fully half a mile he maintained an almost direct line, though gradually bearing to the left.

Then as he gained the distance he believed sufficient, Oscar turned and ran along rapidly, as though about to pass the encampment where he had witnessed the deed of blood but a short time previously.

Though the distance traversed was over two miles, it was accomplished in half an hour, and Oscar found himself at the mete's edge, not many yards from where had flickered the light of the camp-fire. This was no longer visible, doubtless having been extinguished upon Girty's giving the alarm.

"It's neck or nothing," muttered the ranger. "If they've left a guard there, my cake's dough!"

Oscar slung the rifle over his shoulder, in a manner that, even should he enter the water deep enough for swimming, the lock would not become damped, and then placing a bared knife between his jaws, he glided down and entered the water. It was shallow here, and he was forced to crawl

along nearly at the outside edge of the shadow cast by the tree-tops.

He necessarily progressed quite slowly, but finally reached the group of canoes, the object of his venture. As yet no alarm had been given, and the ranger's hopes rose proportionally as he advanced.

"Good! the paddles are all here! Now if I can only get them all loose and started out upon the lake, I don't care how soon they see me."

In the shelter afforded by the four boats, Jewett could work with greater speed, and in a few moments had severed their fastenings, and gently floated the boats out into deeper water though still within the line of shade. A moment sufficed to connect them together, and then choosing one of the smaller canoes, the young ranger cautiously drew himself into it, and seized the paddle.

Then with a strong sweep, he darted out into the clear moonlight, towing his prizes after him. The bold *rene* bade fair to be a success, for thus far no unusual sound broke the forest stillness.

But then came a wild, shrill yell, closely followed by a sharp rifle crack, telling Oscar that he was discovered. The bullet spitefully cut the water a few feet to one side of the ranger, having been discharged too hastily for accurate aim.

And then the cry was taken up and echoed back from a score of throats, until it seemed as though the forest was fairly alive with fiends let loose from Pandemonium. Shot after shot came hissing over the water, but the bold scout sat erect, plying the paddle with strong, steady sweeps, each moment carrying him further away from his enemies.

A taunting laugh broke from Oscar's lips, who recognized the voice of George Girty urging on his red allies. And turning, the young ranger waved his paddle toward the shore in triumphant derision.

He heard a number of quick splashes in the water, and a peculiar smile curled his lip as he again turned and calculated the distance he had passed over. He saw that he was now safe from any rifle-shots, when fired by so uncertain a light.

"One blow--I have not time for more," he muttered, as

his keen eye noted a number of small blackish dots upon the lake's bosom behind him. "But I must strike one blow for poor Sam—the first one of a long and heavy reckoning. If *that* devil would only come! But he knows better."

Jewett was too cunning to leave off paddling entirely, for he knew that, should he do so, the swimmers would either attempt to surround him, when their numbers would prove troublesome, or else back out altogether, before he had a chance to strike his contemplated blow. But while he plied his paddles as though in steady flight, he really retarded the canoe, so that a strong swimmer could easily overtake it.

A backward glance showed him that the foremost savages were near enough for his purpose, and seizing his rifle, he turned and leveled it.

The motion seemed a signal for a general disappearance of the black dots, by diving, on the part of his pursuers, but with ready weapon, Oscar waited. He knew that a few moments would suffice. The savages must rise to the surface for breath.

Then came a bright flash—a choking cry, as the head aimed at sunk beneath the surface, to rise no more a living warrior. The aim of the young ranger had been as accurate as it had been quick.

Once more Jewett seized his paddle, and worked with great energy. A few minutes of this, and he paused once more, drawing his knife and slitting the bark canoes, so that they would speedily fill and sink.

Then casting them loose, he once more sped on. The shore now looked faint and indistinct, and believing he had passed beyond the vision of his enemies, Oscar turned and paddled swiftly up the lake, heading toward the lone cabin where the recluse and his daughter had promised to await his coming.

Oscar's plans were decided from this reasoning. He knew that a man like Girty would never forget the part Letcher had taken in his capture, and would know no rest until he had made good his bitter oath of revenge.

Then, unless he could reach the cabin before the renegade, the two isolated whites would undoubtedly fall victims to Girty's vengeance, as they had promised to await the return

of a party from the fort, not dreaming it possible that the renegade could effect an escape. To delay the red-skins, as well as to facilitate his own progress, Oscar had stolen the canoes.

Even during the brief interval that he had been in Agnes' company, the young ranger had conceived a strong respect and feeling of admiration for her. It was not love, but a consideration that very little would force into that sentiment. And now he resolved to peril his own life, rather than she should come to harm.

All these events had consumed time in their execution, and Jewett saw with increasing anxiety that the night was rapidly waning. That the flight would be one of great peril, he could not doubt, and he dreaded its result for while upon the lake in open day, they would form a mark that could scarcely help but attract the attention of enemies.

He knew, too, that Girty would be upon the watch, knowing as he must that the fugitives would travel by water, for Agnes could ill stand a forced march through the rough and tangled wilderness.

These reflections agitated the young scout's mind, and under this influence he plied the paddle with ex parte vigor, sending the light birchen craft through, or seemingly over the water, with marvelous speed. Nor did he relax his strenuous exertions until the hills that overshadowed the lone cabin loomed up before him.

As the canoe touched the strand, he sprang lightly out and drew the prow upon the sand. Then he hastened toward the cabin, that an anxious glance showed him was still standing.

Pawing beside a tree, he uttered a shrill whistle, and then called out. To his great joy, an answering voice came to his ears from the cabin.

"Who is it that calls?"

"I—Oscar Jewett, Mr. Letcher. Thank God you are safe!" fervently cried the ranger, as he bounded forward.

The door opened to admit him, and then was closed and barred. All was dark within, but the strong hand of the recluse grasped his with a warm pressure.

"Thank God you have returned safely. This has been a

long, long, dreary night for us. It seems an age since you left, though you have returned earlier than you said. Have you brought a boat?"

"Yes—but I come alone. I have not been to the fort."

"Alone—not been to the fort?" echoed Letcher, in astonishment. "Then where is the renegade? Surely you did not trust him to the care of only one man?"

"The devil helps him now, it seems. Girty is free—he escaped," moodily responded Oscar.

"What! You let him escape—you did not kill him first?"

"Listen, Mr. Letcher, before you blame me. We did all that men could do, and God knows that poor Sam has suffered severely enough, without *your* blame being added," and then Jewett proceeded to sketch a brief outline of that night's occurrences.

"You were not to blame, but I almost wish I had killed him when I had the power," gloomily said the recluse. "I greatly fear we have not seen the last of this devil. He will not forget me soon, and no doubt will endeavor to fulfill his threat. Were I alone, I would care little, but I have *her* to guard and watch over, besides."

"I will help you defend her, with my life," said Oscar, earnestly. "But we had better be moving. That rascal will make all haste here in order to get you into his power, though I do not think he will look for my coming here so soon. I believe I put them on a wrong scent."

"The canoe is large enough for us three?"

"Yes, I had an eye to that, when I destroyed the others. You had better strike a light, so as to see what things to pack up. We will need food before the fort is gained, and you have some small articles you wish to save, I suppose."

The three friends worked briskly, and in a few minutes were ready to enter upon their desperate venture. Then they abandoned the cabin and hastened to the canoe.

They entered this and pushed out from the shore. Oscar took his place in the stern, with Agnes facing him, while Letcher occupied the bow. Jewett's foresight had furnished the canoe with extra paddles, when he destroyed the other boats, in case one should break.

"It must be very near morning," observed Agnes, in a low, guarded tone, as they began gliding rapidly over the tranquil bosom of the lake.

"So it is. An hour at the most, and it will be light. I fear we will have a dangerous trip of it. You are not afraid?"

"No--not much. I know father will not suffer me to fall into that bad man's power alive, if the worst comes," calmly returned the maiden.

"It might be better so, though I pray it may never come to that. You shall not come to harm so long as I can lift an arm in your defense," earnestly whispered Oscar.

"You are very kind--every stranger would not run this risk for those who have no claim upon him. We will never forget it while life lasts," added Agnes, in a tone that trembled slightly.

"Thank you--I would do far more than this for you--for any lady. It is only my duty. I will be more than rewarded if you continue to look upon and regard me as a friend."

"That I will--I could do no less. But I fear the worst. A strange and horrible dread weighs down my heart. Do you believe in premonitions?"

"Well, no--I can't say that I do."

"I do. And ever since this morning I have felt ill at ease. It seems impressed upon me that there is a great peril or calamity in store for me. I do not believe that I will ever behold the setting of the sun again!"

The words of the maiden were incoherent and uneven, and appeared uttered more to herself than to Oscar. And despite his strong good sense, the young ranger felt a shuddering dread possess his spirits, as though this was a prophecy destined to be terribly fulfilled.

"The feeling is but natural, Miss Agnes," he uttered in a melancholy tone, though still speaking guardedly. "It springs from the dangers you have been exposed to this day--or rather yesterday. Believe me, 'twill soon wear off, and you will be the first one to laugh at your ill-founded presentiment, ere to-day is past."

"I hope so--I pray that your words may be true, but I can not drive the dread away, try hard as I may."

During this conversation, the two paddles had been steadily wielded, and the light canoe glided over the water like a very thing of life. Already a goodly distance had been traversed, since leaving the lone cabin.

The moon had long since sunk to rest, but the stars shone brilliantly, and quite an extensive view could be had of the lake's surface. Morning was now close at hand, and the two men bent vigorously to their work, in silence, knowing that their lives might depend upon the progress they made before the sun arose.

"Ha! listen!" muttered Oscar, bending his head, and ceasing to paddle.

Barely distinguishable, there came to their ears, borne upon the favoring breeze, a faint yell, seemingly from the land they had left behind them. A significant glance passed between the fugitives.

"It is the Indians—they are at the cabin," uttered Letcher, in a strained voice.

"Yes, you are right. Well, better there than here. They're far behind us, and, with God's help, we will keep them there," cheerily observed Oscar.

"But may not they follow us?" anxiously murmured the maiden.

"Let them—with the start we have, it would sadly trouble them to keep us in view. No, if they are all we have to fear, I feel as safe here as I would be in Detroit itself."

"Then you fear others?"

"A good scout never allows himself to become foolhardy," evasively replied Jewett. "In war time he acts and moves as though every bush and tree concealed a lurking foe. But there may be others to dread. I hope not, but such may be the case. You know Girty overheard our plans. He knows that I escaped with the canoes, and that I would either hasten to the fort for assistance, or would keep on to your house. He knows, too, that we will attempt to reach safety by water, for your daughter's sake. Then, reasoning thus, he may have sent a party to the river, so as to stop a boat going either way. It is what I would do, were I in his place, and he is a good scout; there is no denying that, scoundrel as the renegade is."

"Look!" again cried Agnes. "Is that the sun rising yonder?" as she pointed to a bright and gradually increasing glow somewhat to the left of their rear.

"No—it is a fire! The Indians have set fire to the house," replied Oscar, after a quick glance. "It is too far to the north. A curve in the shore deceives you."

The canoe still sped on, under the powerful impulse given the two paddles. All now felt too much anxiety to converse, and the minutes rolled on, while the gray light in the east heralded the coming day.

This was a sight most unwelcome to the fugitives, as they well knew that their greatest safety now lay in darkness. They had not yet traversed half the distance to the river, and felt that their peril was momentarily increasing.

"Ha! look there!" abruptly cried Letcher, in an agitated tone, pointing before him. "Your eyes are sharper than mine, Jewett. What are those? canoes?"

"Yes—two of them—and full of men at that!" hoarsely muttered Oscar, after a moment's scrutiny of the objects indicated. "Quick! they may not have seen us yet. To the shore! If they catch sight of us, we are indeed lost!"

The bow of the canoe was instantly turned toward the shore, and the greatest powers of the two men put into play. But the distance was considerable, as they had not deemed prudent to pass where the sound of their paddles might betray them to a watchful enemy upon the shore.

"Too late—they see us! My God! all is lost!" groaned Letcher, as a faint yell came to their ears, and the canoes were seen turning toward the fugitives, their paddles flashing quickly in the rapidly-increasing light.

"No—don't stop. It's our only chance. We must take to the woods and try to throw them off the scent. Luckily I know the bay of the ground well. I think we will have time for it." Paddle, man—paddle for your life and for *her* life, hurriedly cried Jewett, as he bent to his work until the tough ashen paddle bent and strained beneath the pressure.

"Jump out—quick," he added, as the canoe touched land. "Hand me the provisions; we may need them. Help her and follow me closely."

Oscar gave one quick glance around him, and then entered the forest, at a half-run. Agnes required but little assistance, for she was in good health, and accustomed to out-door exercise, while the vindictive yells of the nearing savages added wings to her feet.

Oscar only entered the woods for a short distance, before turning abruptly to the left, though that course brought him nearer the enemy, with every step. But, fortunately, Fletcher was too greatly agitated with fears for his child's safety, to note this, else he might have demurred, and hesitation now would prove fatal.

"We can not keep this up clear to the fort," he uttered despondingly. "Agnes would die!"

"I don't intend it. We must use strategy, and if you trust in me, I will save her yet."

"I will—I will."

A few hundred yards brought them to a slight rise in the land, running almost parallel with the lake shore, and over this ridge Oscar darted. At its base ran a broad but shallow creek, flowing over a pebbly bottom.

Into this Jewett sprung, and, turning, caught Agnes in his arms, carrying her like a baby. Then he turned *up-stream*, thus almost retracing their steps, and going *from* the fort, instead of toward it, as one would naturally suppose he would do.

"You mistake—this is the wrong way!" cried Fletcher, in dismay.

"Don't talk—come on. It is the only thing that can save us now. Those devils would overtake us before we ran a mile, should we keep on. Trust in me—I know what I am doing," rather impatiently uttered Oscar.

Letcher yielded to this decisive tone and manner, and followed close in his young friend's footsteps. The water, flowing on, effectually obliterated what faint traces were left by their moccasined feet.

Jewett kept on with unflagging vigor, for nearly a half-mile, holding Agnes in his sturdy arms above the water, without any apparent effort. The aspect of the country grew more broken, and at times the creek-banks were shoulder high.

Oscar paused near the base of a slight hill, whose face, toward the stream, was broken and rocky, studded here and there by a scrubby bush, or a mass of clinging creepers. Here the young scout paused and turned toward the recluse, saying:

"We are at the place I spoke of, now. Step in my tracks, and be careful you leave no traces behind you."

He emerged from the water, and using the thickly scattered stones for his feet to rest upon, advanced to the foot of the hill. Gently lowering Agnes to the ground, he cautiously parted a leafy screen of bushes, thickly matted with vines and creepers, revealing a small, dark opening in the hill-side.

"It is a dark and cheerless place," he added, as Agnes involuntarily shrunk back, "but 'tis better than falling into *their* power. You will be safe here as long as you exercise common prudence."

"But I don't understand you," said Lecher, anxiously eying the refuge. "Are we to stay here until they give up the search for us?"

"You admit that Miss Agnes could never stand a forced march to the fort?"

"Yes—'twould be impossible."

"And we can not hope to fight them, with her in charge —those we saw in the canoes?"

"No—you surely know that. They were nearly a dozen of them."

"Fully that. Well, then, I must try to get to the fort, and return with help. You can remain here in safety, for they will not be able to follow our trail. I will strike out and try to pass through them."

"But how--would it not be better for both to go, in different directions? One, alone, may never get through."

"And leave her alone here, in this dark hole? No. I will do my best, but if I fail, then you must try it. If I am not here by midnight, you can feel assured that I will never come; that they have ended my trail. Then you must either attempt taking her in, or else go for assistance yourself, leaving her to await you here. But now good-by. Don't feel uneasy, for I am confident I will succeed. Good-by!"

There was a warm hand-clasp with the two refugees, and with their fervent God-speed ringing in his ears, Oscar turned and reentered the creek, while Letcher and Agnes groped their way into the cave, after carefully arranging the vine-covered bushes as before.

Their feelings were far from being pleasant, as they reflected upon the desperate venture of their new-found friend, doubly so now, that the Indians knew of their presence in the immediate neighborhood. And then, too, how were they to escape, should he meet with misfortune? This situation was gloomy, indeed.

CHAPTER VII.

BOUND TO THE STAKE.

The recluse and his daughter gazed around them with natural curiosity, but at first, the abrupt transition from daylight to comparative darkness blinded them. But then, they gradually began to distinguish the outlines of their strange refuge.

It could scarcely be dignified by the name of a cave; a hole would be far more appropriate. Its greatest width was not more than a score feet, while in height, it averaged but little more than one-third that.

The entrance to this den was framed in with rocks, and would not admit the passage of more than one person at a time. The sides, floor and roof were formed of mingled rocks and earth, irregular and unsightly. It was damp, gloomy, and without not the most pleasant place imaginable, as the two fugitives were forced to admit.

"It has one recommendation," observed the recluse, to Agnes, as they closely scrutinized the den. "The hole is barely large enough for one Indian to get at us at a time, and I can hold it easily, until help comes."

"But what if they use fire - can not they smoke us out?"

Letcher started, but did not reply. This was a peril he had not foreseen, and one, too, that he had no means of guarding

against. Should the savages discover the retreat, and put the plan into execution, the fugitives would be lost indeed.

Letcher took a position close to the entrance, and arranged a small aperture through the bushes, by which means he commanded a tolerably fair view of the creek, for a distance of several yards. He had great hopes that this bold ruse would throw the enemy entirely off the scent, but knowing, as he did, the almost marvelous cunning of the savages while upon the war-path, he dreaded lest they should yet unearth them.

As he listened, a cry came to his ears, followed by several rifle-shots, from the same direction; that toward which Oscar Jewett had disappeared. Then came more yells, as he thought, expressive of vindictive joy, telling of some triumph.

Letcher uttered a low groan, and sunk back, his entire frame quivering with horror. Right well did he know what those sounds proclaimed.

"My God! he is lost - they have killed him!" he gasped, as the sounds died away, ceasing abruptly.

"Who—father, what is it?"

"Oscar — they have murdered him! Did you not hear the demons shout in triumph just now?"

Agnes made no reply, but her head bowed upon her hands, though the friendly gloom prevented the recluse from detecting the hot tears that filled her eyes. She had known this young ranger but a few short hours, as time is generally computed, but the time was long enough for him to make a deep and lasting impression upon her mind, and her heart was sadly troubled as she thought of him, dead or dying, knowing that he had given up his young life for her sake.

Neither of the two spoke. Their reflections were too gloomy and dispiriting to be uttered aloud. To give them utterance would only increase their anxiety and natural fears.

Letcher crept like a loonie, trying in vain to derive a ray of hope from the continued silence of the Indians. Might not Oscar have escaped them? No; else, why those yells of exultation?

At length, he was forced to believe that the young ranger was either dead or a prisoner, while the savages were searching for himself and daughter, for there had been light enough

upon the lake for them to have counted the fugitives. And once found, the end would be sure: though it might be protracted until he could inflict considerable loss upon the assailants. Still, there could be but one *finale*.

A desperate resolve gradually grew to fill his entire mind. Turning toward his daughter, he muttered, cautiously:

"Agnes, child, are you asleep?"

"No, father, I was only thinking," wearily replied the maiden, lifting her head and hastily brushing away the tears that still dimmed her eyes.

"You heard those shots—those yells?"

"Yes—I heard them."

"And you know—that is—I'm afraid our young friend has fallen into the power of those red devils," hesitated Letcher.

"God forbid! May it not have been some other person?"

"That can hardly be. The woods are not so thickly peopled as that. No, it would be worse than folly to try to blind ourselves to the black truth. They have got him, either dead or alive. The rifle shots and yells of triumph tell us that, but too plainly. It is a fearful loss to us, Agnes; not only because he was a true-hearted friend, though he won upon my affections greatly in so short a time; but that it cuts down our hopes of escape to one thread. If *that* fails also, then may God have mercy upon you!"

"What do you mean, father?"

"Agnes, my child, I must leave you here alone," slowly responded Letcher.

"Father! But no, you do not mean it—you are only trying my courage."

"I do mean it—there is no other way now. Both our lives depend upon it, child. If we stay here, what will be the result? Sooner or later the Indians will unearth us, or else we must starve for lack of food. You can never stand it to make the journey through the forest, afoot. It would kill you. I must make an attempt to reach the fort, where I can get help to return for you. There is no other resource."

"You will be killed—like he was!" brokenly answered the maiden.

"It is a risk I must run. There is a chance, at any rate

that I may succeed. I know the roads well, and I firmly believe that I can elude the Indians."

"Why not wait until night? It will be safer then."

"No, I must not lose the time. We would have to make the return journey entirely by day, then, while now I hope to leave the lake behind us before daybreak. But, darling, you will not be afraid? You know that it is for the best that I leave you, and that should bear your spirits up. Hope that I may return safely—pray for it, child?"

"I will—I will," gasped Agnes, as she crept to her father's side and clung tremblingly to his neck. "But I fear the worse—I fear we will never meet again. My presentiment—merciful Heaven! it comes to me stronger than ever! Father, don't go. They will kill you—I know it. I seem to see you now, lying in the forest, still and—dead! Don't go—stay with me, and if we must die, let it be together. We are the last—mother, brother, sister, all gone—all but you. Don't go—it will kill me!"

"Agnes, pet, don't think of that. It *will* be death, if we stay here. Every hour increases our danger, and lessens the hope of escape. Bear up, and show your true, brave-hearted daughter. It is for *your* sake that I go. Cheer up and hope for the best," murmured Letcher, as he kissed his child tenderly.

Agnes, by a powerful effort, regained her composure, at least in seeming. She saw that her father was resolved, and indeed her own good sense told her that his reasoning was correct.

"There, yet, I know you again now. It is for the best that I leave you. But remember, remain quiet here, and don't venture forth on any account. You have food enough, with care, to last you for several days. I will leave my flask full of water for you. I will return by midnight, I hope, but do not look for me before that."

The parting was a silent but tearful one. Agnes was greatly grieved, but nobly repressed her emotions, and then the recluse left the cave, after giving the maiden his flask, filled with water from the creek.

Letcher entered the stream and continued down its bed for several hundred yards, before emerging on the opposite side,

for the purpose of preventing any search being made in the vicinity of the den that might end in Agnes' discovery. Then he rapidly strode through the woods, bearing toward the west, and giving the lake shore a wider berth.

He had traversed perhaps two miles since leaving the cave, when he came to an abrupt pause. Before him, upon the still dewy grass, were numerous imprints of moccasined feet.

"Indians--and they have passed by since sunrise?" he muttered, as he straightened up and glanced keenly around him.

A low exclamation broke from his lips as the snapping of a twig met his ears, sounding immediately behind him. A quiet, searching glance showed him that his life was in imminent peril.

He noted several lurking figures gliding along upon his trail, not more than fifty yards in his rear. His first impulse was flight, and inhaling a long breath, he bounded forward like a startled deer.

But this was an unfortunate move, though probably the only one left him. The sound of his footsteps in rapid flight, attracted the attention of those engaged in trailing him, and with wild yells of exultation they sprung forward, at the same time hastily discharging their rifles at the fugitive.

Letcher uttered a low cry, and staggered for a moment, reeling blindly, but then dashed on with unabated speed. He knew that he was hard hit; a dull, peculiar numbing sensation filled his left side.

But the race was of brief duration. The pain in his side quickly robbed Letcher's feet of their fleetness, and he heard the shouts of his pursuers grow nearer and assume a more exultant tone, as they noted the drops of blood that so plentifully sprinkled the grass.

He believed he had received his death-wound, and knowing that he must soon be captured, if he trusted to flight, he abruptly wheeled and threw up his rifle. With little effort the savages sprang to cover behind the nearest tree.

But quick as were their motions, the arm of the reclus anticipated them, and as his rifle cracked, one of the Indians sprung high into the air, uttering his wild death-yell as he fell headlong to the ground, tearing convulsively at the dirt and leaves in his agony.

Knowing their prey must be unarmed, the others sprung forward with shrill yells, brandishing their weapons in high glee. But they were obliged to fight for the trophy, ere they won it.

Letcher retreated to the trunk of a huge tree, and desperately clutched his rifle. Then the savages were upon him.

For a moment the struggle was fierce and deadly, but the wound he had first received was rapidly depleting Letcher's strength. Already his vision was blurred, and his brain reeling.

His blows fell with irregularity, and lacked force, and then a dextrous blow felled him to the ground. He only knew that fresh forces were coming up, and a strong, hoarse voice, with words that he could not understand, rang faintly in his ear, as his senses fled, and he lay there helpless at the mercy of his conquerors.

Strange as it may appear, Letcher's first sensation on returning to consciousness, was of some person trying to restore him. His mouth and throat burned with the taste of very brandy, and his face was wet with the same pungent fluid.

Even before he had power to open his eyes, he wondered at this. These persons had tried their best to kill him, and were now as assiduously laboring to preserve his life as before to destroy it.

A low cry broke from his lips as his eyes rested upon a white face; that is, the face of a white man, though deeply tanned and sunburnt. He thought that he had been rescued from death by friends.

But this belief quickly fled, and in its stead came a withering horror. He knew now why such pains had been taken to restore him to consciousness.

Over him bent the renegade, George Girty. A malignant grin distorted his countenance, and a cruel, vindictive look glared in the bloodshot eyes that met the gaze of the red-man.

"Ho! ho! so ye 'cluded to come to, did ye? Lucky, too, fer ef yo'd ha' die'd there, it'd ha' spoilt a heap o' fun. You know me, don't ye? Girty, the renegade? That's what ye called me yest'day, ain't it? I told ye then to look out -

thet my turn'd come soon. I didn't lie--you see it has come, don't ye?"

Letcher did not reply, but averted his eyes with a convulsive shudder. At that moment he thought it would have been far better had he died at once, rather than be in this demon's power, to be tortured both in body and mind.

"Cold, be ye? Trimble like ye hed the ager. Never mind--two'll last long. Warm ye up, purty soon. I told these fellers if they wouldn't kill ye jest then thet I'd show 'em some fun. Must keep my word. I always do. I told them two f'lers thet you give me up to, thet I'd be even 'th them, an' so I am. I killed one--the long-legged feller--'th his own knife, an' got away. T'other one is dead, too. Some o' my braves did thet job fer me. An' now I've got you."

Girty paused as if expecting a reply, but if so he was disappointed. Letcher firmly met the malicious gaze with a look of stern defiance.

"Why don't you ax what I'm goin' to do 'th ye?"

"Murder me, I suppose. What else can I expect from an accursed renegade? One, too, that has eaten at my board, and been nurced by me through illness. Ingratitude is the nature of the beast," scornfully retorted Letcher.

"An' who saved your life, why don't you add? But you paid me fer bein' such a darned fool, by givin' me up to be killed; after passin' your word thet you'd do nothin' ontel to-day. But you forgot that, I spose. All right. I don't grumble at it. I'll be even 'th you, though, afore long. But never mind that now. What o' the gal?" he added, abruptly, in evident hopes of catching his captive off his guard.

"Where you will never find her," promptly replied Letcher.

"Don't be too shore. You might slip up on it. I know this: she's *alone* wherever she is, an' can't git away. She'll come to me, sooner or later, be shore o' that. I've swore thet I'd hey her fer a spaw, an' so I will. Nothin' kin hinder me. But I don't like to wait. I'm old, an' a day, more or less, is a big thing to me, now. So tell me what she is hid, an' I'll save your life. Not let ye go entirely free, fer the Injuns wouldn't like that, but I'll promise 'at you can live--a sort o' slave, like. Will you do it?"

A contemptuous smile was Letcher's only answer. It greatly enraged Girty, but he managed to control his passion.

"I understand ye—but don't think it. You'll give in. You *must*.—I'll make ye glad to. When you stand at the stake, an' feel the hot flames a-crawlin' up your legs, an' a-chettin' off your breath, you'll knuckle under. An' *won't* be clar, too, to help the fire make it lively fer you. Pitch-pine splinters is nice things, when they're stuck under your finger or toenails. Bullet-molds, too, after bein' in the fire fer a bit, look nice a-hangin' to your ears an' tongue. *Fed* good, too. An' hot knives skins a feller so slick. Don't let ye bleed so much—sorter dries it up, ye know. Don't you think you'd better tell me whar the gal is?" grinned Girty, diabolically.

"No! I would rather, ten thousand times, kill her with my own hand, than that she should fall into your power," cried Letcher, desperately, yet unable to restrain a quiver of horror at the atrocities so complacently alluded to by his tormentor.

"You won't hev the chainee, fri'nd, an' be shore *I* won't kill her—unless it's by kindness. Fact is, I'm dead in love 'th her—over head an' years. Made up my mind to git shet o' all my other squaws, so I kin turn my hull 'tention to Agnes. Hey a nice time, she will, ef she acts decent an' don't cut up rusty. I'll whale her then—I will, fer shore. I al-lays do that to my squaws, when they don't act right. Makes 'em love me, ye see. But come—no foolin'. Tell me whar she's hid, or I'll make you wish you'd never bin born!"

"Do your worst—I defy you!" desperately cried Letcher, straining violently at the raw-hide cords that bound his arms.

"So I will—you hev only yourself to blame, you pesky fool," angrily snarled the renegade, as he turned and uttered a few quick words to the braves, who were standing around.

A general chorus of gratified grunts showed their approval of his decision, and then they scattered through the forest. Letcher was not left long in suspense, and then as the first warrior returned, the worst fears of the wounded captive were confirmed.

He bore a load of dried wood upon his shoulder, that he cast at the foot of a small tree, indicated by Girty, then darting away in quest of more. Others followed this example,

until a goodly pile of fagots were collected. Girty then turned to his prisoner, and rudely jerked him to his feet.

"It's your last chancce--I won't ax you ag'in. Tell me whar the gal is hid, an' I'll save your life yit. Refuse, an' you'll be roasted to death, tortured as 'cutely as a Delaware knows how to do the job."

"I've given my answer. I repeat it--do your worst. I will never tell you where to find her," calmly replied Letcher.

"So be it, then. Die, like the durned fool you air!"

Letcher was dragged to the tree, and firmly secured to its trunk, then the fagots were carefully piled around him, at a little distance. Girty did not speak to him again, but stood overlooking the preparation, adding a suggestion now and then, as his keen eye detected an error.

At length all was completed, and the savages silently drew back. Girty advanced and gazed keenly into the pale face of the victim, searching for some sign of yielding.

But the features of Letcher were firmly set, and it was evident that he had schooled himself to meet the terrible trial with all possible fortitude. A dark scowl wrinkled the renegade's countenance, as he turned away and produced a flint and steel.

A light was speedily procured, by those rude means, and carefully fed with splinters, until the blaze was strong enough to be applied to the dried fagots. Then in a dozen places the flames began to creep up, in and out through the sticks, sending forth forked tongues of scorching heat toward the captive, as though eager to begin the work of torture and death.

Stern and immovably, Letcher's gaze was fixed upon the face of his bitter enemy. He awaited the fearful death, with manly fortitude.

Girty shrunk involuntarily from the gaze, but then, with a fierce oath, he turned toward the eager braves, and uttered a few quick words. A yell answered him. The torture was about to begin!

creased. Then Andy uttered a low cry, and drove the canoe to land.

He sprung to shore, and then ran along a few yards, when he suddenly paused and leveled his long rifle. Oscar stared at him in mute amazement.

The rifle cracked. Then followed a shrill yell—a yell of death-agony, telling that the old scout had fired at a human mark, and that his hand and eye had been true to his will.

"It's the gal, Oscar—press on! ther may be more o' the imps!" shouted Goochland, as he sprung forward, dexterously reloading his rifle at the same time.

With a wild cry Jewett dashed past him toward the cabin, where he could now see the form of the maiden he had learned to love even in that brief but eventful time since they first met, lying motionless upon the ground, beside a huge savage, whose form still writhed in agony, and with one hand fastened in a death-grip in the flowing hair of Agnes Letcher. Oscar thought of nothing but her possible danger.

Not so Goochland. He heard a chorus of shrill yells ringing in the forest behind him, coming from near the lake shore, and turning, he beheld a horde of savages with Girty limping along in their rear, rushing toward them at full speed.

For a moment he was undecided, but then as he saw Oscar gain Agnes' side unmolested, he dashed toward the canoe, and with desperate energy urged it down the river.

"Quick! Oscar, fetch her down. The Injuns is on us—quick, fer your life!" he yelled, as he checked the boat at the rude landing, from which a path led up to the cabin.

Jewett realized the peril at a glance, and seizing the fainting maiden in his strong arms, he dashed down to the canoe, when Andy shoved it off. As the boat skimmed along, a hasty volley was sent after them by the Indians, but without effect.

"Buckle to it, lad—the imps air chasin' us," muttered Andy.

But Oscar needed no such adjuration. He was working for more than his own life now—for that of the maiden he loved.

The savages, urged on by the infuriated renegade, chased

the canoe for a considerable distance, but were left far in the rear. And then relaxing their efforts, the scouts paddled on more leisurely.

Agnes quickly recovered from her swoon. The bullet of Goochland had prevented the savage from injuring her, if, indeed, such had been his real intention.

The journey to the fort need not be detailed. Henceforth it was uninterrupted.

Agnes found a kind home, and in due time she recovered from the trying events of those nights of flight. Of course she rewarded the gallant scout in the orthodox manner, and as man and wife they lived happily for a long term of years.

Andy Goochland also lived to see peace declared.

Of George Girty, we need only add that he died of *delirium tremens*, some six years after the date of our story.

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